

# A HEART DIVIDED

A NOVEL



J. M. SNYDER

## A HEART DIVIDED

...Andy frowned as the stranger gulped down the water. The lamplight fell short of the man's face, but Andy could see the dark coat he wore, marking him as a Union soldier. *Hardly more than a boy*, he corrected, taking in the smooth hands and thin wrists that held the canteen tight. "I thought you a rebel," he said as the soldier drank. "You sound Southern."

The soldier laughed. "Most men I know would kill you for that comment alone, water or not."

"Then I'm glad you're not most men." Andy sank to his knees beside the soldier, the damp ground seeping through his weathered breeches. "You say you aren't dying?"

"Who are you?" the soldier asked abruptly, ignoring his question. "I can't see your face."

"Lieutenant Anderson Blanks, of the Fifth Regiment out of Biloxi." He felt a cold hand grip his as the soldier caught his breath. "What is it? What—"

"Andy."

The word was nothing more than a sigh, barely heard over the breeze, but it rang through Andy like the peal of a church bell, echoing through his heart and his blood. *My God, it can't be. It's the night and the weariness and the memories haunting me, nothing more. Sweet Lord Jesus above, don't do this to me, don't You dare...*

But his name in that voice, one he'd heard in dreams every night for the past three years, since the day he had watched the

train carrying his lover disappear into the west. “Sam?” he breathed. “Sam Talley? Christ above, is it really you?”

The hand in his tightened. He didn’t dare hope, didn’t dare *believe*...

ALSO BY J. M. SNYDER

*All Shook Up*  
*Beautiful Disaster*  
*Beautiful Liar*  
*Beneath A Yankee Sky*  
*The Bonds Of Love*  
*Carey'd Away*  
*Crushed*  
*An Evening With The Rush Hour Hero*  
*Matching Tats*  
*A More Perfect Union*  
*On Company Time*  
*Outage*  
*Persistence Of Memory*  
*Playing The Field: Faceoff*  
*Playing The Field: Tee'd Off*  
*The Positions Of Love Series: Books I - XII*  
*The Powers Of Love*  
*The Powers Of Love, Book I: Origins*  
*The Powers Of Love, Book II: Everyday Hero*  
*The Regent's Knight*  
*Seventh Inning Stretch*  
*Under A Confederate Moon*  
*Wanted*  
*With This Ring*

# A HEART DIVIDED

---

BY

J. M. SNYDER

AMBER QUILL PRESS, LLC

<http://www.AmberQuill.com>

A HEART DIVIDED  
AN AMBER QUILL PRESS BOOK

This book is a work of fiction.

All names, characters, locations, and incidents are products of the author's imagination, or have been used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, locales, or events is entirely coincidental.

Amber Quill Press, LLC  
<http://www.AmberQuill.com>

All rights reserved.

No portion of this book may be transmitted or reproduced in any form, or by any means, without permission in writing from the publisher, with the exception of brief excerpts used for the purposes of review.

Copyright © 2009 by J. M. Snyder  
ISBN 978-1-60272-511-9  
Cover Art © 2009 Trace Edward Zaber

Layout and Formatting provided by: Elemental Alchemy

PUBLISHED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

# CHAPTER 1

*March, 1865*

The candle cast an unsteady light through the tent, pushing shadows back into dark corners and flickering across the makeshift table where Lieutenant Anderson Blanks sat, hunched over as he wrote another letter home. This one began *Dearest Mary*, and he couldn't think of much more to say that hadn't already been said before.

*I am alive*, he mused, dipping the quill into the pot of ink nearby, but she would know that by the fact he wrote to her, wouldn't she? And who could say that would still be true whenever she received the letter? It took days for the courier

## A HEART DIVIDED

to run the mail into town, and with enemy activity so close by, those days might turn into weeks and he very likely *would* be dead by then. How many men had he already lost under his command? He couldn't remember.

*It is evening*, he wrote. He could picture his younger sister sitting on the verandah of their Southern home as she read the letter, her long hair spun into soft curls that cascaded down her shoulders and back. She'd be sipping tea in the afternoon sun, his letter in one gloved hand, a delicate fan in the other stirring up a faint breeze around her. The heady scent of magnolias would permeate the air. Mississippi was hot in April, and he didn't think she would receive the letter before then.

*I am well as I write this, but who knows what tomorrow will bring? Or next week, or next month, even? Your brother Andy may yet be counted among the dead, but I hope not. I pray for an end to this war, as I have fervently prayed every night since Sumter fell, but as of yet my prayers have not been answered. I am beginning to doubt they ever will be. The good Lord has turned His back on our battle, and Mr. Lincoln wishes to kill all of our boys, I fear. That will be the only end to this war.*

Beyond the thick canvas tent Andy could hear cicadas, their high pitched screech like violins in the night. With the sleeve of his shirt he wiped the sweat from his brow. *I hate Virginia*, he thought as he fanned himself with a blank scrap of parchment. At least back home the evenings ended cool and refreshing like peaches kept on ice, but here the heat of the day seemed to linger after the sun set, and Andy longed to be



## *A HEART DIVIDED*

home.

In the quiet of his tent he could close his eyes and recall the memory of soft breezes blowing in off the small river that wound through his father's farmland. Crystal clear water bubbling over rocks and churning up white-capped spray after a heavy summer storm. How cold it felt on bare feet, sending shivers up Andy's spine whenever he dipped his toes into the tumult. Thick grass on the bank like velvet when he lay back upon it to stare up through the branches of the old white oak, in whose shade he'd hidden many a hot summer day...

Thinking of the river brought back memories of a simpler time, before this present conflict. When all he'd had to worry about were the horses in the barn, or the crops in the fields. No men under his command, no bullets whizzing by, no turmoil in his life.

Which brought to mind Samuel Talley, the scrappy young man his father had hired to tend the horses. Sam, who'd become much more than a friend to Andy in the five years he'd worked on the farm. His green eyes had matched the grass on the riverbank, a fact Andy had noticed when he pressed Sam back against the ground to claim their first kiss. The thick crop of reddish-blond hair that had grown bushy and unkempt while he worked at their farm always reminded Andy of the old fairytale where they spun straw into gold.

The thought of Sam made him ache, as it did whenever memories of the young man resurfaced. Andy wondered where he was now.

*West somewhere.* He bent over his letter again, but now

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

that he'd thought of Sam, he couldn't get the boy out of his head. His wasn't the type of personality satisfied with being relegated to the past. Before the war had begun, Andy had known the pleasure of Sam's touch, the softness of his lips. He still recalled the feel of firm hands on his body, the tongue licking hidden skin, the weight of Sam above him and in him when they'd made love.

It all ended the day Andy's father had caught the two of them in the hay. They'd been in various stages of undress—Sam's hands thrust beneath Andy's shirt, Andy's fingers working loose the ties at the front of Sam's breeches. Sam had just tweaked Andy's nipple, sending a wave of pleasure shooting through him; he leaned his head back and gasped in delight. When he sat up again, his gaze drifted past his lover to his father, glowering in the shadows of the barn.

That was all the excuse Daddy Blanks had needed to fire the boy, despite Andy's protests. Chased from the farm, what little money Andy had convinced him to take tucked into his pocket, Sam bought a railroad ticket out west. Though Andy had been forbidden to see him again, he couldn't bear to let Sam leave alone; they'd stood pressed together behind the depot, holding each other close, as they waited for the train that would take him away. "I'll send for you," Sam had promised between kisses. "As soon as I scrape a few dollars together, and get us a place to stay. I'll not forget you."

"Nor I you," Andy had sworn.

Three years later, here in his tent, alone, on the edge of a battlefield somewhere in the backwoods of Virginia, Andy

## A HEART DIVIDED

could still taste those tender lips on his. Three long, lonely years...did Sam still wait for him? Had a letter arrived at his father's home, a train ticket inside, asking if he were interested in traveling west? Would his sister tell him if it had? Or would his father recognize Sam's name and toss the missive into the hearth unopened? Would Andy ever know if Sam still thought of him?

"*I'll send for you,*" he'd said. Then the war had begun, and Andy hadn't heard from him again. *I don't know where he is or what he's doing now, but God, please keep him safe. And if it's not too much to ask, please keep me safe as well, so I can be ready when he sends for me.* But what use were prayers, when he'd been praying for the war to end and this was now the fourth year of conflict?

Dipping the quill into the ink again, he wondered if he should ask Mary for news of Sam, but her letters always ended the same way. *Nothing from the west.* She left it ambiguous because their father was apt to find the letter before she mailed it, and if he knew Andy still held out hope that he and Sam would be together...well, Andy didn't want to think about *that*. Better to let his father believe he had saved his son from sin, and hold out the hope that when this war ended, Andy would return to the farm.

It wouldn't happen. He wouldn't re-enlist, and if there were no word from Sam by then, he would sell his part of the homestead back to his father and head west. To make his fortune, he'd say, but Mary knew better.

His *heart* knew better. He'd find his boy.

## A HEART DIVIDED

He pressed the tip of the quill to the paper and sighed as he continued his letter.

*In my mind I still hear the cannons that boom in the daylight, faint and faraway but constant reminders that there is a war being fought, and I've forgotten what it was we hoped to get from it. The dead are all we have left. I only hope they forgive us when this is finished. I am weary of the sounds of rifles and the stench of gunpowder! I know the fields back home are green now, the cotton coming in, the trees full of fruit. I remember...*

Andy paused, frowning. He remembered Sam above him in the field of cotton, the two of them shirtless and out of breath because they had raced from the stables hand in hand to collapse in a tumble to the ground. He remembered strong arms and sweet kisses, the momentary discomfort as Sam entered him, and the way Sam always whispered he loved him when they were both spent.

He wasn't going to write *that* in the letter.

With the quill against the paper, the ink began to bleed through the parchment, a thick black stain that ran into the other words. "Shit," Andy muttered, dusting powder along the ink to dry it out. Now he'd have to begin again, and he didn't have much ink left, and only one last sheet of paper.

Carefully he brushed the powder off the table and blew on the paper to dry the ink. Maybe he could still salvage it... *I hate this, everything about this. I'm stuck here in the woods of Virginia, in a damn rebel camp fighting a war that's already lost, when I should be on the prairie somewhere, riding to find*

## A HEART DIVIDED

my boy. Sam would be in his early twenties by now, three years older than he was in Andy's mind. He had sent one letter, just one—postmarked St. Louis and dated almost a year and a half after he'd left the Blanks plantation. When it arrived addressed to him, Andy had climbed into the loft of the stable and lay on his stomach in the scented hay while he read the cramped words. *I still love you*, the letter started, and it ended with, *Soon, Andy. I promise you, soon*. That was the only thing that kept Andy going some days, that faded, worn letter he saved hidden among his personals.

A soft rap interrupted his thoughts. Shaking his sister's letter to dry the ink, he called out, "Yes?"

It was too late for any news from the front—battles were difficult to fight in these woods during the day, and impossible by night. And his aide had already delivered his supper of cold soup and hard biscuits, which sat on the ground by his feet mostly uneaten. He couldn't imagine who wanted to speak with him now.

The tent flaps parted and someone ducked inside. Andy recognized the blonde, bowl-shaped haircut but waited until the candlelight illuminated his visitor's face before he smiled. "Wiley," he said, setting his letter down as he turned toward the lieutenant. "It's late."

Lieutenant Wiley Bucknell nodded, his blue eyes as dark as the ink staining Andy's letter. "I know, but the pickets are spooked."

"Spooked?"

*Aren't we all?* Andy wanted to say, but a glance at Wiley's

## A HEART DIVIDED

pursed lips kept the thought in check. "This isn't about the mosquitoes again, is it?"

When their unit first marched into Virginia, the men were terrified of mosquitoes, having heard horrible tales of the diseases the bugs carried, and it took all Andy had to keep them from shooting at the damn insects with their scant ammunition. With a sigh, he smoothed out the edges of his sister's letter. "I haven't the time for such trivialities—"

"I know," Wiley said again. "But you know how the men are. They're miles from home and it's been days since the mail ran. They're dispirited and hot and afraid that they aren't going to make it through the night alive. They can hear the Yanks in the woods, they say, and I know it's just talk but it's scaring the shit out of them. They say they hear screams of the dying, a soldier killed and gone to ghost, shooting for them. They say—"

"I say they're grown men," Andy replied, a little upset. Of the three lieutenants stationed in their camp, why was it Wiley always passed these matters onto him? "Take it to McNair," he told his friend. "It's not my job to quell the gossip."

But Wiley grinned at that. "McNair said take it to you."

Andy sighed. *Damn you for doing this to me, Wiley.*

Wiley continued. "He said you're good with the men. Just calm them down for the night and we'll send out a search party in the morning."

"For ghosts?" Andy asked, frowning.

Wiley laughed. "Just to prove there's nothing out there. You know the routine, poke the bodies, make sure they're

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

dead. McNair likes this location, and he's got orders from General Lee himself to stay here as long as we can hold it. But if the men are scared..." He let the sentence trail off, the thought left unsaid.

Andy knew what he meant. *If the men are scared, they're apt to run*, he thought as Wiley watched him, waiting. *Like rats deserting a sinking ship. Damn.* He sighed again. "I'll go have a word with them."

"I'll let McNair know," Wiley replied as he left the tent.

Andy folded his sister's letter and left it on the table. He'd finish it when he came back from the camp's perimeter. *Just calm them down.* He twisted his mouth into a wry grin. *As if it were that easy.*

## CHAPTER 2

Removing a wooden lantern from its iron holder near his cot, Andy stuck what was left of his candle in the lantern. They were running short on supplies as it was, the whole camp on rations, the soldiers in shoes bound with twine and clothes held together with dirt and grime. *That's why I have just one piece of paper left. Grant will starve our men and we'll come begging to surrender, anything for a meal that consists of something more than tepid soup and stony bread. Here you go, General, the heart of the South for another sheet of parchment, what do you say? Just to pen a note back home.*

He rolled the few matches he had left into a strip of cloth and shoved them beneath the thin cot where he slept. Though



## A HEART DIVIDED

he trusted his men, times were hard, and he didn't want to leave the lucifers out where someone might be tempted to filch them. Mary's letter went beneath the cot, as well, with the remaining sheet of paper. The ink pot he capped and shoved into his haversack at the end of the bed, and with one foot he eased the plate of food under the table. He didn't think he'd eat it, but he didn't want it to go to waste, not when so many other regiments were starving. *Maybe I'll pack it away in the morning and keep it just in case.*

Outside his tent the night was sultry and warm, the humidity this early in the year like a wet rag flung against him as he stepped out into the camp. Around him a few fires flickered in low pits, illuminating ragged soldiers hunched over the flames not so much for warmth but for light. A couple of the men glanced at Andy as he passed—they eyed the lantern he carried, envious, before turning back to their Bibles or dice or whatever else it was they used to make the war bearable.

Andy moved through the camp easily, a ghost among his own men, his gray shirt and pants bleached white in the glow from his lantern. When he reached the edge of the camp, he considered returning to his tent for his coat and rifle. His rank was spelled out on the coat in patches, and the rifle would give him some semblance of protection against the night. But he was only going to talk with the men on picket duty. They knew who he was by sight, and what use was a rifle against imagined voices and disembodied ghosts?

With quiet steps, he moved through the underbrush that

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

ringed their encampment. The pickets were lonely men, bored with their duty, nothing else—young men jumping at shadows. Andy hadn't the patience for that, not tonight. His mind wanted to retreat to the past, and nothing sounded better than a solitary evening spent beneath the thin blankets on his cot, reminiscing about a boy he once knew. Three years was too long. Too damn long.

As he neared the outskirts of their encampment, he halted and called out, "It's me." He heard the pickets shift uneasily in the darkness ahead of him. "Lieutenant Blanks."

"Show yourself," came the stiff reply.

Andy raised the lantern to reveal his face. For a few blinding moments he blinked in the bright light, not surprised to see it reflect off the dull metal of a bayonet pointed at his chest. Then he heard a sigh of relief and the bayonet disappeared.

"Sir," the picket said, snapping to salute.

Andy held out the lantern to see who was on duty. Williams and Lovelace. He knew them by sight but couldn't recall their given names. They were just two more men in a company of hundreds. Williams stood tall and lanky, his hair shaved to a thin buzz cut to fight off a particularly bad infestation of lice that plagued the enlisted men. He had small, narrow eyes that glistened darkly in the glow of Andy's lantern, and though he held his gun at his side, his gaunt cheeks and distrustful squint still made him look dangerous.

Beside him stood Lovelace, a short, stocky man, with thick arms and a bulging stare that always unnerved Andy. The way

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

his gaze darted nervously from Andy to the woods and back again belied his fear of whatever might be out among the trees. His salute was sloppy, and he shifted from foot to foot as if he had a touch of dysentery and wanted to slip away to relieve himself in the sink.

Both men were younger than Andy, who at twenty-five felt ancient. Three years in battle did that to a man. He felt old before his time, and in the haunted eyes of these two soldiers, he didn't see men staring back at him but mere boys, pawns in a game that threatened to claim their souls. They should be at home, with their families, with sweethearts who pined for their return. Not here in the dark and the dirt. Not here.

Williams' Southern accent betrayed his Kentucky roots. "Just being cautious, sir."

"Understood." Andy lowered the lamp and sighed. "Lieutenant Bucknell says there's talk of a ghost."

Williams laughed, a shaky sound Andy thought was only a cover for the picket's superstitious fear. "Ghosts, sir?" he asked, nudging Lovelace. "I don't—"

Suddenly Andy heard it, a faint cry in the distance that sounded ghostly in the darkness of the night.

All bravado drained from the pickets' faces. "See?" Lovelace whispered. He shoved Williams hard, almost knocking the older man down. "You laugh and it starts up again. Do you want to die tonight? Do you want it to get us?"

"Ghosts don't get you," Williams replied. "Tell him, sir. Tell him that's just—"

"It's not a ghost," Andy said. When Lovelace started to

## A HEART DIVIDED

speaking, he raised one hand to silence him. “Shh.”

The pickets fell quiet, and together the three men listened, straining to hear the cry again. It flowed like a tide, and just when Andy thought it would crest into actual words, it retreated again until it was nothing more than a windy whisper. But it was a human voice, he was sure of that much. *Just another soldier left for dead*, he mused, suddenly sad. War was a gentleman’s pastime, played in boardrooms and around conference tables with no regard for the reality of combat. The men who began this strife knew nothing of the horrors that befell those fighting at their command. Left for dead in the night, dying on a battlefield. Forgotten, alone. Another casualty in the game.

“It’s no ghost,” he said again, his voice softer.

Beside him Lovelace’s eyes widened in disbelief and Williams shifted from one foot to the other, watching Andy closely. “It’s a dying man,” Lovelace whispered. With sweaty hands, he grasped Andy’s wrist. “Might as well be a ghost. Who’s to say he isn’t already dead?”

“You’re spooking yourselves,” Andy admonished, frowning at the men. “You don’t need this fear. He’ll be dead by morning.”

“So we have to listen to him die?” Williams asked, his face twisted in disgust.

The voice rose again and Andy wished he could hear the words. *A man’s last breath screamed into the night, and no one knows what he says*. Andy could only picture too well the same fate befalling himself, a sad, lonely death. Who would

## A HEART DIVIDED

tell his sister? She'd wait anxiously for his next letter but there'd be no more missives. His last words would be lost to the wind because no one heard them. No one would know...

And what of Sam? *He'd send for me and think I hadn't waited as I'd promised. How long would he wait for me? Who would tell him I'd gone?*

That thought was salt on the raw wound of his heart. It cut him deep, etching compassion and sadness into his soul. Holding out a hand to Williams, he said, "Give me your rifle."

"Mine?" he asked, incredulous. But at the stern look on his commander's face, he handed the gun over reluctantly. He frowned as Andy strapped the rifle across his back. "What if it's a Yank out there?"

"I don't care." Without asking, Andy took Lovelace's canteen. "This is inhumane. There's a dying man out in those woods, and you two scare each other with ghost stories while he shouts himself hoarse. A little water, is that too much to ask?"

"He's already dying," Lovelace pointed out. "And we can't leave our posts."

Andy picked up the lantern and started out into the darkness. "Then I'll find him myself."

"Sir, you can't." Williams caught Andy's arm, stopping him. "You don't know what's out there. You can't just leave the camp."

Andy stared at the hand on his elbow until the picket let go, then leveled his gaze at the two men. In the light tossed from the lantern, his eyes flashed like gunpowder and he

## A HEART DIVIDED

clenched his jaw, angry. "I'll do as I will," he replied. "I'm your commander. You'd do well to remember that."

"Yes, sir," Williams mumbled, stepping back. "I'm sorry, sir."

"If it were you," Andy continued as if the soldier hadn't spoken, "you'd want someone to come for you, no? You'd want a little company at the end, just a warm hand and a smile, someone to tell you it would be all right and it was okay to let go, wouldn't you?"

The pickets dropped their gazes before his and shuffled their feet, chastised.

Andy held up the canteen and shook it until he heard the water slosh around inside. "A little water to wet your throat, a hand in yours, someone who promises to tell your ma you died a soldier's death. It's what we all want, isn't it? Yank or Reb, it's what we all want."

"Yeah," Lovelace agreed. He sighed as he ducked his head.

Thinking of his own ma, Andy suspected. He remembered what he knew of the boy, and he had heard the Lovelaces were a wealthy family, full of children and no doubt proud of their oldest off to war. *Thinking it might be you out there, just like it might be me. And how you'd want someone to come say goodbye, even if his coat was blue. It wouldn't matter, not in the end.*

Andy wondered if it mattered much at all anyway, the color of their coats, but this wasn't his war. He only fought because he had to—it was the right thing to do, it was

## A HEART DIVIDED

noble...and he feared that would be lost somewhere along the way, too, once the war was over. What he fought for, what all the men out here fought for, it would be mangled by time and fate and only the dead would know for sure.

Lovelace cleared his throat. "You want one of us to come with you?" he asked, his voice low, as if he thought he should ask out of obligation now but was afraid Andy might take him up on the offer.

Andy shook his head. "I'll be fine," he said, shouldering the rifle into a more comfortable position. "Give me a half hour. If I'm not back, tell Lieutenant Bucknell."

*Tell him I'm out chasing ghosts. See what he says to that.* He smiled at the thought.

"Be careful out there, sir," Williams cautioned as Andy stepped into the woods.

Andy nodded and held the lantern out in front of him, illuminating dense trees that glowed gray like his uniform, their limbs twisted and gnarled and bare. Above their leafy branches, gray clouds raced across the face of the moon. They reminded him of the crop back home, and he remembered sitting in the barn with Sam, laughing as they rubbed the raw cotton between wooden brushes to get the seeds out. The memory bolstered him, giving him the courage he needed to push through the spectral trees and brambly bushes that tugged at his clothes.

*If that were me out there, I'd want someone by my side,* he told himself, turning toward the voice. It strengthened as he approached, but it was still far off and he hoped he reached the

## ***A HEART DIVIDED***

soldier before he died. *Someone to mail a letter to Mary, let her know I love her, and she'd tell Sam.* Andy thought his last word would be his lover's name, and he definitely wanted someone to know that, to tell Sammy he'd been the last thing on Andy's mind when the final darkness closed over him and there were no more clouds in his sky.



## CHAPTER 3

*Another thing I hate about this place. Too many damn trees.*

Andy shoved aside the low branches that caught in his hair as he walked through the woods. Back home they had flat land filled with cotton and tobacco, and the only trees were well-planned orchards of peach and apple and pear, laid out in straight rows the length of the farm, filling the air with heady scents of ripe fruit, sweet like perfume in the summer heat. There were a few trees down by the river, nothing much, and some bushy undergrowth, but Mississippi didn't seem besieged with such wilderness, not like this stretch of Virginia. *Should've conceded this state to the Union*, Andy thought

## A HEART DIVIDED

bitterly. *Let it go when Grant crossed the border. Let him deal with this wilderness.*

Around him the night was quiet, filled with only the scant wind that carried to him the ghost soldier's distant voice in waves, the scrape of the tree limbs above him, the noise he made as he walked through the woods. He didn't try to hide his presence—what was the use? The man was dying anyway, Andy was sure of it. Dead leaves crinkled beneath his boots, and bushes rustled as they snapped back into place behind him, cutting him off from the camp. He reminded himself the enemy wasn't nearby—scouts had assured them that much the day before when the Yanks retreated after a heated skirmish, and at any rate, anyone who heard Andy would probably mistake him for another noisy ghost left dying on the battlefield. Soldiers were apt to believe anything. His lantern flickered dangerously low as he walked, despite the glass shielding that protected the flame.

The voice grew louder, taking on words, lyrics Andy recognized as a gospel song he'd last heard at his mother's funeral years ago. A popular song of comfort...of course the soldier would sing it now, in the dark, alone. Like water, the song trickled through the trees, leading Andy onward into the night. It was a comforting sound, full of sadness and regret, and it tore at his heart to think his men had wanted to leave the soldier to die by himself an ignoble, lonely death. *Please God*, he prayed as the voice grew stronger the closer he approached. *Please don't let me die like that. Remember this, if you would, when my time draws near. Remember I came for him, and let*

## A HEART DIVIDED

*someone hear me when I go.*

The trees pushed back around him, opening into a small clearing where his men had clashed with the enemy earlier. Though he had cursed the trees' closeness, Andy hated the open field more. The trees seemed like sentinels now, holding back to let him break through their ranks and venture forth alone. He felt exposed, with his lantern in hand, and suddenly the rifle across his back felt paltry and useless.

Another couple steps and he stumbled against something soft. Not a branch or bush. Something human. He stopped and closed his eyes, taking a deep breath to steady himself, then lowered the lantern to the ground.

The light shone over a dead man lying at his feet, sightless eyes staring into the night sky as if to watch the clouds scurry away above the trees. In the darkness Andy couldn't discern the color of his uniform, whether it was blue or gray, but did it really matter at this point?

He didn't think so.

Bending down, he twisted off two buttons from the man's coat. With gentle hands, he closed the man's eyes, placing a button on each lid to keep them shut. He didn't know how many dead there were in the clearing, and he couldn't possibly hope to do the same for all of them, but it was the least he could do for this one. "Go with God," he murmured. He didn't know if the quick prayer would help or not, but at least it couldn't hurt now.

Carefully, Andy stepped around the corpse, keeping his arm straight down at his side to cast the light from his lamp

## A HEART DIVIDED

onto the ground. He didn't need to step on another soldier. He knew not all of them out here were dead.

He walked a little farther across the field—the trees were shadowy shapes hemming him in, the wind through their leaves like traitorous mutterings. The ghost's song rose and fell on the breeze. Andy followed the sound, crossing the field, watching his feet move around lifeless limbs. Flesh shone pale in the light of his lantern, coat sleeves and pant legs dark with blood. He thought he might be nearing the opposite side of the clearing when the song cut off abruptly.

Andy hesitated, unsure if he should speak. Where was this man, who had drawn him out here? Did he lay at Andy's feet, waiting? Or had he dragged himself into the woods a bit, away from death? When Andy took another cautious step, he heard the unmistakable click of a rifle hammer drawn back.

"Closer and you die," a soft male voice said. "I'll shoot you dead."

"Then we'll both go home to Glory." Andy stopped, setting the lantern at his feet.

The stranger in the darkness laughed, an easy sound, one that sounded familiar to Andy for some reason. *A Confederate*, he reasoned, because he heard a hint of the South in the voice from the darkness. *It reminds you of home, that's all.*

"I'm not dying," the soldier said, his voice stubborn.

"Bullshit," Andy murmured.

For a moment he didn't think the soldier would answer, and he wondered if he could chance another step. He imagined the man somewhere ahead of him, propped up against the

## A HEART DIVIDED

body of a fallen comrade maybe, the last of his strength used to level the rifle where Andy stood. *He heard me approach and loaded the gun while he sang, enticing me on like a siren singing a sailor to his death.* Andy felt a surge of pride at the soldier's presence of mind despite his circumstances. In another world, he thought maybe they might have been friends.

Finally there was a sigh and the stranger laughed, a weary sound. "You thought me dying," he said, "and you came for my rations, is that it? You'd take the clothes from my back and the shoes from my feet, and help yourself to any money you find, any food I have, my ammunition and weapon, maybe. Anything on me."

There was a familiarity to the voice; Andy knew it. A soft Southern twang when he'd been expecting something more Northern, to be sure, but it wasn't simply that. The words tugged at his memory, that laugh seeped into his brain, and he wished he could raise the lantern to get a good look at the man. Did Andy know him from somewhere? "I want nothing from you," he said, his voice low.

The soldier laughed again. "You lie. But I've sad news for you. I finished the last of my rations this morning, and there are only a handful of minie balls left in my bag. I'll let you have one in the stomach if you take another step."

"I brought you water," Andy offered. Despite the stranger's harsh words, he felt a sudden kinship with this man, unseen beyond the circle of light cast by his lamp. They were just two soldiers, without rank, two souls somehow alive on a

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

battlefield littered with dead.

“Water?” the soldier asked, as if he had never heard the word before. The surprise turned to suspicion. “Why?”

“I thought you were dying.” Even though the stranger couldn’t see him, Andy shrugged. “I don’t know. My men heard you singing and thought you were a ghost out here, come to steal their souls for the devil.” The stranger laughed again, and Andy smiled at the sound. “I came because if it were me, I’d want you to come. I’d want someone to find me and sit with me a bit, ’til I go.”

“I ain’t going nowhere,” the soldier said softly, and Andy heard the faint clatter of metal as the rifle was set aside. “Water?”

Andy unshouldered his own rifle and set it down on the ground beside the lamp to show the soldier he was unarmed, as well. Then he shook the canteen, more than half full. The water sounded like a promise as it sloshed around inside the container. “Water,” he affirmed. “I can toss it to you—”

“You can bring it,” the soldier replied. “I’m...there’s a bullet in my thigh. I don’t cotton the thought of dragging through the dead to find the canteen if you miss.”

With slow, deliberate movements, Andy picked up the lamp again and stepped closer. In the flickering glow he saw the soldier appear like a ghost, a faint outline propped against a fallen log, taking shape and definition as Andy approached. He saw pants dark with blood from a ragged hole high on one leg, and he held the canteen out as an offering of peace.

When he wasn’t shot as he approached, he came closer,

## A HEART DIVIDED

and knelt by the man's side.

The soldier took the offered canteen with a sigh. "I'm so damn thirsty," he whispered, uncorking the container.

Andy frowned as the stranger gulped down the water. The lamplight fell short of the man's face, but Andy could see the dark coat he wore, marking him as a Union soldier. *Hardly more than a boy*, he corrected, taking in the smooth hands and thin wrists that held the canteen tight. "I thought you a rebel," he said as the soldier drank. "You sound Southern."

The soldier laughed. "Most men I know would kill you for that comment alone, water or not."

"Then I'm glad you're not most men." Andy sank to his knees beside the soldier, the damp ground seeping through his weathered breeches. "You say you aren't dying?"

"Who are you?" the soldier asked abruptly, ignoring his question. "I can't see your face."

"Lieutenant Anderson Blanks, of the Fifth Regiment out of Biloxi." He felt a cold hand grip his as the soldier caught his breath. "What is it? What—"

"Andy."

The word was nothing more than a sigh, barely heard over the breeze, but it rang through Andy like the peal of a church bell, echoing through his heart and his blood. *My God, it can't be. It's the night and the weariness and the memories haunting me, nothing more. Sweet Lord Jesus above, don't do this to me, don't You dare...*

But his name in that voice, one he'd heard in dreams every night for the past three years, since the day he had watched the

## A HEART DIVIDED

train carrying his lover disappear into the west. “Sam?” he breathed. “Sam Talley? Christ above, is it really you?”

The hand in his tightened. He didn’t dare hope, didn’t dare *believe*...he raised his lantern between them and the flames leapt high, throwing back the night into shadows that danced at the edges of the light. Now he could see the copper hair, mussed and unkempt, those eyes that shone like emeralds, that thin face he’d once held between his hands and kissed until those lips had looked pinked and bee-stung from his own. It was Sam, here, with him. Bloodied and bruised but alive. It was *him*.

Andy sighed. “My God.”

He leaned down as Sam pulled him near. In all his memories, all his dreams, these kisses had *never* felt as wondrous as they did tonight by the unsteady light of his lantern.



## CHAPTER 4

The words tumbled from Andy in a rush. Relief and fear twisted in his heart, making him sick. “What are you doing here? In a Federal uniform, no less? Your last letter said St. Louis...”

“That was years ago,” Sam said with a breathless laugh. His hands clenched in Andy’s gray shirt, holding him close.

Andy caught those hands in his. They were cold, so cold, and he tried to rub warmth back into the strong fingers. “How the hell did you get caught up in this damn war, too? And for the North? Sam.” The questions tumbled out in a rush and Sam laughed again, a sound that still managed to make Andy grin foolishly after all this time. “I’ve prayed for you and now

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

you're here. Here! Lord God. Maybe my men were right, maybe you *are* a ghost and you aren't really here at all—"

Sam cut off Andy's words with another kiss. "Do you think I'm a ghost?" He held Andy's hands in both of his and stared up into Andy's face, his eyes bright in the lamplight.

Andy flushed. "No," he replied. "God, no. I've dreamed of your kisses for so long. I know all too well the ache they leave behind in the morning when I wake and you're not there by my side."

"You'll not ache again," Sam murmured, his lips soft against Andy's own.

For long moments it seemed as if they could never be satisfied with the trembling kisses and gentle caresses, the forgotten feel of skin against skin, and Andy wondered if he could possibly find words to fill the three year void that had separated them. But words were unnecessary; their bodies remembered each other's touch. There was no awkwardness between them, no anxious pauses, no nervous chatter. Nothing needed to be said that their hands and lips couldn't convey. The years they'd known each other created a balm over the time they'd been apart—the romance they'd shared had blossomed into a tender love through absence. The hunger in Sam's kisses told Andy he wasn't the only one who had longed for his lover in the night.

Finally Sam rested his head against Andy's chest and sighed, content. Andy eased an arm around Sam's shoulders, cheeks cooling in the night air, lips swollen from Sam's own. "The water's gone," Sam whispered, turning the empty

## A HEART DIVIDED

container upside down to prove his point. "You didn't happen to bring food as well, did you?"

Andy thought of his uneaten supper, still on the ground in his tent. "When did you last eat?" he asked, his voice low.

"Morning," Sam said with a sigh. "I wasn't lying when I told you I have nothing. They left me for dead."

"Let me see your wound." Andy sat up and repositioned the lamp so he could look at the torn place in his lover's leg, where skin and cloth fused together in a thick patch of dried blood that looked black in the light. "Is the bullet lodged inside?"

"Don't know." Sam winced when Andy tried to pick the fabric out of the wound. "We were retreating when I took the shot. I fell like a brick to the ground and must've hit my head, I'm not sure. Next thing I know, I'm facedown in the mud and my leg's on fire."

"They left you." Andy couldn't believe it was that simple, just turn around and run, leave behind those who fall. *But I've done it myself*, he thought, trying to see the extent of damage to his lover's thigh, though when Sam drew in a sharp breath, he stopped prodding at the wound. "How long ago was that?"

"Two days?" Sam asked, unsure. "Maybe one. Maybe more, I don't know."

Andy grimaced at the wound. "You need a surgeon." He thought of Mendenhall, the regiment sawbones, likely in bed at this hour but surely Andy could rouse him. "There's one back at the camp. Can you walk?"

Sam frowned. "I think not, but for you, I'd try."

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

“No,” Andy said with a sigh. “Of course not. But I can bring him back here. He can take a look at it, maybe give you something for the pain, stitch you up—”

But Sam shook his head. “Look at me.” When Andy did, Sam reached out and stroked one hand down the curve of his jaw. “I’m dressed in blue, Andy. Do you think any surgeon in the Confederate Army will take this bullet out of me? Even if you order it, pull rank over him, do you think he’ll do all he could to keep me alive?”

“You’re from Tennessee,” Andy reasoned. “I don’t know what you’re doing fighting for the Union, but you’re a Southerner by birth.”

“He’ll see the color of my coat and shoot me on sight,” Sam told him, “like a lame horse. It doesn’t matter where I’m from.” When Andy shook his head, Sam nodded. “Yes, Andy. In this land, I’m the enemy. You know that.”

“I’ll tell them you’re not,” Andy persisted. He held Sam’s hands and kissed the battered knuckles. “I’ll tell them you’re mine. I’ll say...”

But Sam simply laughed. “Yours.” Andy didn’t like the bitterness he heard in his lover’s voice. “Like you told your father? Remember what happened then? I was chased from the farm with no more dignity than a slave.”

Remember? How could Andy forget?

Sam’s eyes softened as he saw the effect his harsh words had on Andy, and he cradled Andy’s face in his hands. “I love you, Andy. God, these past few years have been hell, you know that. And I can see in your eyes that you love me still.

## A HEART DIVIDED

But that means nothing to anyone else. It's a hard truth, I know, but it's the truth nonetheless."

"I do love you," Andy murmured, kissing Sam's palm. *God, please*, he prayed, folding his fingers around Sam's as he held his lover's hand to his face. *Don't give him back to me just so I must lose him now. I won't let You do that. I won't let him go.* He thought about the other men lying around them in the darkness, bodies of the dead from both sides, and in a quiet voice he suggested, "You can switch uniforms. There are plenty to choose from, no? We'll redress you as a rebel and..."

"That won't work," Sam told him. "I steal a coat from one of these men—what if I get a general's stripes? In the dark, they all look the same, and if I make that kind of mistake, your sawbones will know I'm lying." When Andy started to protest, he shook his head again. "No, really. I don't even think I could get out of these pants if I tried. My leg's swollen and it hurts too damn much. The bleeding has stopped but I think it's just clotted, no place to go, you know? It hasn't healed."

Andy sighed. "I'll not let you die," he promised. "If I have to, I'll suture the wound myself."

In the quiet darkness, that thought took hold. He *could* do it—he knew he could. Mary had taught him how to thread a needle, a small skill that had become invaluable in the field, where he'd been forced to stitch his uniform whenever it tore because there simply weren't enough new clothes to go around.

He raised his head to meet Sam's gaze, the idea taking root

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

in his mind. "I can do it, I'm sure I can. I've seen Mendenhall work. It's nothing but sewing, right? Just a little mend like in a shirt. It can't be hard."

Sam's eyes widened. "You have a kit with you?"

"No," Andy admitted, "but I can go back to the camp. It won't take long. I'll go back and get some food, then ask Mendenhall to give me what I need to stitch the wound." He held his breath, waiting while Sam thought it over.

"What if someone asks?" he started, but Andy brushed the question away.

"No one will ask," he assured Sam. "You said yourself I could pull rank. I'll tell them to mind their own damn business and leave me to mine. It'll work, I know it will."

Sam frowned, unconvinced.

"You're wounded," Andy said, squeezing Sam's hand in his. "You can't walk and if you don't get medical attention soon, you'll die. You will. Infection will set in and they'll have to amputate and God, Sam, I couldn't bear that."

Sam swallowed, his throat clicking with a dry sound that made Andy wince. "I couldn't, either," he whispered.

Though they fought on opposite sides of the war, Andy knew his lover had surely witnessed men suffer through amputations, just as he himself had seen after the heat of battle—strong men brought to tears under the surgeon's saw, nothing but a piece of wood like a horse's bit between their teeth to keep them from screaming out as the ether wore off. The memory was haunting by the light of the day; here in a battlefield strewn with the dead, with nothing but the dim

## A HEART DIVIDED

glow of a lantern and the moon peeking from behind lacy clouds, it was the stuff of nightmares.

In a tiny voice, Sam asked, “Do you think it’s that far gone?”

*I don’t know*, Andy started to say. But one look in Sam’s troubled eyes and he forced a smile. “Not yet,” he replied, though he couldn’t see the wound clearly in the lamplight. He didn’t even know if it were salvageable at this point.

He couldn’t say that, not out loud, not when Sam’s eyes begged him for reassurance. “Let me go back to the camp.” Andy nodded at his own idea until Sam nodded as well. “The remnants of my dinner are still in my tent—I’ll bring them for you. And a kit, too, and more water. You can get some food in your belly and then I’ll clean your leg, stitch it back up again. By morning you should be good enough to walk, don’t you think?”

Sam sighed. “Maybe,” he conceded, but he didn’t let go of Andy’s hand and Andy made no move to stand. With his thumb, Sam rubbed a soft spot along Andy’s palm, smoothing the skin between his forefinger and thumb with a ticklish touch. Suddenly he laughed. “Remember the first time we kissed? The first time ever?”

Andy smiled. “By the river, wasn’t it?”

Surprisingly, Sam shook his head. “No, that...” His laughter lit up the light, and a wicked gleam crept into his eyes. “That was a first, all right, but I got more than just a kiss from you that day.”

Andy could feel his face heat up. “True.” The kiss on the

## A HEART DIVIDED

riverbank had led to much more, and by the time the sun fell from the sky, the two had become more than friends—they'd become lovers. As they had walked back to the main house, holding hands until they reached the edge of the cornfield, a dull ache had settled between Andy's buttocks, a sweet stretch, a lingering burn, that with each step reminded him of the feel of Sam within him.

But their first kiss, before that...Andy mulled over his memories, each kiss standing out in his mind. He counted back through them, through hugs and touches and more, until he found it. No one had spoken of secession then, and the nation had still been whole. How old had he been?

Seventeen, and Sam a few months younger. It'd been years ago, but the time spent seemed as inconsequential now as dust in the wind. When Sam had hired on at the Blanks' farm, there had been something about him that made Andy's heart quicken whenever he was around. Boyish friendship and innocent flirting made them inseparable, and they spent every waking hour together if possible. Andy loved him, he *knew* he did, but he kept it to himself because this was *Sam*, his father's stable hand and his own best friend. The feelings growing within him as the boys matured were the devil's doing, the preacher told him so, and it was anathema to dwell on things he shouldn't, like the way it'd feel to touch and hold and taste his friend.

Sam was hired to care for the horses and, while he worked at the farm, Andy trailed along after him, in the barn or in the field, pitching hay, riding the steeds. One day while they were



## *A HEART DIVIDED*

out in the lower field, trying to break in a couple new ponies, Andy's mount spooked, tossing him to the ground. In seconds Sam was at his side, hands rubbing away the pain, the fear and love in his eyes so great Andy almost cried. "I'm fine," he said, slapping away Sam's hands as he struggled to stand. Each touch was a brand on his skin, burning him. It hurt to have to push those hands away. "Sammy, really. I'm fine."

Without warning, Sam brushed his lips against Andy's in a quick, relieved kiss. Then he stood, pulling at Andy's hand to help him up. A thin blush crept into his pale cheeks, until they blazed as red as the hair on top of his head. He scuffed his boots in the grass, unable to meet Andy's gaze. "God," he sighed. "I'm so sorry. I didn't mean..."

Andy had laughed. "Damn," he drawled. "If I'd have known all it took was falling off a horse to get a kiss from you, I'd have done it much sooner."

With a relieved grin, Sam asked, "So you're not mad?"

"Mad?" Despite the ache in his arms and back from tumbling off his horse, Andy tackled his friend, wrestling him to the ground. Pinning Sam beneath him, he rubbed his nose against his friend's and murmured, "Do it again."

Years later, on the bloody battlefield that stretched out dark and quiet around them, Andy laughed at the memory. "I remember." With a tender kiss, he added, "Let me run back to camp for food and supplies. It won't take long, I promise."

"I love you." Sam wrapped his arms around Andy's neck, pulling him into a tight embrace. "Thank God you found me. Thank God it was you."

## CHAPTER 5

Andy wanted to leave the lantern with Sam. “You need something to keep back the night,” he reasoned. He hated the thought of leaving his lover alone in the dark, sitting in the midst of a field of the dead. An irrational part of him feared that when he returned, Sam would be nothing more than another lifeless shell cast on the ground, spent in battle.

But Sam shook his head and looked at Andy standing over him, unwilling to just walk away. “You need it. Your men will shoot you in the dark. I’ll be fine, Andy, really.” He pushed Andy’s knee in an effort to get him moving. “Take the lantern.”

He was right. Lovelace and Williams were so jumpy,

## A HEART DIVIDED

they'd likely shoot first, then ask Andy's name. What an ironic way to die—survive the battles only to be killed by his own men. Especially now, when he'd finally found Sam...he thought of the slip of wax back in his tent, a candle he'd wrapped so carefully earlier and stowed away beneath his cot, and wished he had it with him now.

Then a sobering thought hit him. *I told the men to tell Wiley if I didn't return in a half hour. God, how long has it been already?*

He wondered if they'd send a party out for him this late. Knowing Wiley, he thought maybe they would. Then what?

They'd find Sam.

His lover was right—Andy could talk until he lost his voice and his compatriots would still only see a Union soldier, a wound in his thigh, not dying quick enough for their tastes. They'd want to take him prisoner, or worse, shoot him. Andy couldn't let that happen. He *wouldn't*.

*But what, I take on the whole damn Confederate Army to keep him safe?*

He didn't want to think about that. Instead he picked up the lantern, and with a defeated sigh, admitted, "I don't like this."

"I'll have light enough when you come back," Sam said with a smile. That crooked grin still managed to ignite the world for Andy, and his heart skipped a beat to see it again. "I don't mind the dark so much."

But Andy shook his head. "I don't mean just that. How'd you get on the wrong side, Sam?" When Sam started to

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

answer, Andy held up one hand. "Tell me later. I've got to make sure they don't send anyone after me. I don't want them to find you."

Quickly he bent and pressed his lips to Sam's forehead. He wanted to fall into the kiss, just forget the war and the dead—the memory of this man had been the only thing, at times, that kept Andy going. In his solitary tent, or marching between battles, or choking down the meager food they called meals. This man, and the promise he held out to Andy, the hope of a peaceful future to the west, away from the fight...that had been a diamond in the distance, something to struggle for, something to attain.

And yet here he was now, dragged into the war as well, and wounded. If Sam died here, Andy knew he didn't have the strength to go on. There would be no more promise, no hope. The west would hold nothing for him, and that Confederate bullet lodged in Sam's leg would kill two men, not one.

Andy vowed that wouldn't happen.

He tousled Sam's hair as he stepped back. "I'll return."

"I'll be waiting," Sam replied.

The picket's rifle lay where he'd set it on the ground. Retrieving it, Andy started into the woods, the lamp held low so he didn't tread on the dead. The trek back took no time at all, and as Andy neared the camp, he crashed through the bushes noisily to make sure the pickets heard him approach.

Ahead of him, someone called out, "Lieutenant? Is that you?"

"No, I'm the ghost." Andy suppressed a grin as he stepped

## A HEART DIVIDED

through the high grass. “I’ve come to snack on your bones and leave you for dead.”

The two men on picket duty stood at the edge of camp, frightened looks on their young faces as they watched him push free from the woods. One rifle pointed toward him, but it aimed too high and would’ve shot through the branches above Andy’s head if it had discharged. As Andy came closer, that rifle dropped and relief replaced the fear on the pickets’ faces.

“That’s not funny,” Lovelace said, suddenly angry. With the rifle in one hand, he shook it at the lieutenant to make his point. “We could’ve shot you.”

“Is that thing even loaded?” Andy countered.

Lovelace ducked his head, embarrassed, and dropped his gaze to the ground.

His dejected stance told Andy the barrel was empty. What good were pickets if they were unarmed? With a shake of his head, he tossed the canteen at the picket, who dropped the rifle to catch it, then cursed when the gun landed on his foot.

“There are no ghosts,” Andy told them.

“He’s dead?” Williams asked.

“Who?” Andy felt a rush of adrenaline surge through him and his mind whirled. *They know. I don’t know how but they do, they know about Sam, they’ll find him and kill him, they know...*

Before his thoughts could spiral out of control, Andy took a steadying breath. *They mean the soldier. They don’t know who he is. They mean the soldier they heard singing into the night, the one they thought was a ghost—that’s all they’re*

## A HEART DIVIDED

*asking about. Remember? You went to take him water. You didn't know it was Sam then.*

"The voice stopped." Lovelace pouted as he bent to retrieve his rifle. "We didn't hear a shot so you didn't kill him. Was he already dead?"

Andy glanced from one man to the other and back again, unsure of what to say. Too much, and he could put Sam in danger. Too little, and they wouldn't believe him. Come the morning light, they'd send a party out to that field and find Sam anyway.

The pickets didn't seem to notice his silence. Shaking his empty canteen, Lovelace asked, "Who drank this?"

Thinking fast, Andy lied, "I did. I found a field of soldiers. Don't know which one was singing but they were all dead by the time I got there. I drank the water and looked around a bit but..." He shrugged. "No one's alive out there. And there are no damn ghosts haunting the field, either. So I came back. I doubt you'll hear anything more from the woods tonight."

He held out his rifle, which Williams took almost gratefully. "We told Lieutenant Bucknell where you went. He said you were nuts, chasing after ghosts in the night."

Andy laughed at that. "He's still here, right?" he asked, a little apprehensive. "I mean, he didn't send anyone after me..."

"Not yet," Lovelace replied. "He wanted volunteers and I told him he was crazy, too. No offense or nothing, but I ain't going out there, you know? I ain't taking my chances."

Williams elbowed Lovelace. "Didn't your ma ever tell you

## A HEART DIVIDED

there ain't no such things as ghosts?"

But Lovelace stubbornly shook his head. "My ma always told me to listen to my heart. 'Harry, don't do anything you don't want to do.' That's what she says and that's what I listen to. Ghosts or not, I don't want to muck around out in the dark, get shot and trip on the dead and all that shit. Not me."

From behind him someone laughed, and Andy saw Lieutenant Bucknell heading their way. "You're just scared," he said, laughing when Lovelace shrugged. To Andy, he asked, "How'd the ghost hunt go?"

"No ghosts." Andy pushed by the pickets and started toward his tent, hoping to leave the men behind. *Have to pack up the rest of my dinner*, he thought, making a mental checklist of things he needed to do before he returned to Sam. *See Mendenhall for ether, a needle, some thread. Maybe some whiskey to clean out the wound. And that candle...*

The other lieutenant fell into step beside him. "Did you chase them all away?" Wiley asked with a laugh.

Andy frowned, lost in thought. "Who?"

"The ghosts." With his elbow, Wiley nudged him to get his attention. "That *was* what you went out there looking for, wasn't it?"

Andy shrugged. "I went to give a dying man some water, that was it." When Wiley continued after him, he added, "He was dead when I got there. No need to send soldiers in the morning."

"Too late," Wiley said.

Andy stopped in front of his tent and frowned.

## A HEART DIVIDED

With a grin, Wiley explained, “McNair thinks it’ll be good for the men. We’re sitting around here doing nothing until the Yanks attack again or General Lee himself sends down orders for us to back him up at Petersburg. Besides, we’re low on supplies, you know that.”

Scowling, Andy asked, “So that’s what this is? A scavenger hunt? See what you can get from the dead—”

“They don’t need it anymore,” Wiley countered.

“What the hell have we become?” Andy wanted to know. His voice rose in anger, and soldiers gathered around the nearby fires glanced in their direction, curious. In a lower tone, Andy muttered, “We aren’t vultures, Bucknell. We’re human beings. As were they.”

Anger clouded Wiley’s face. “Jesus, don’t get righteous on me here. You know we need clothing and ammo and food. Grant’s cut off our supply line from Atlanta and no one’s going to help us out but us. You *know* this. And now you’ve got qualms about stealing from the dead?” he folded his arms defiantly across his chest, jaw clenched. “They’re the lucky ones, Andy. They’re not in this goddamn war anymore. We are.”

*But you’ll find Sam, Andy thought, meeting Wiley’s steady gaze. You’ll take him from me and I’ll not let you do that. Not you, nor God, nor General Lee nor Grant, nor President Davis nor even Mr. Lincoln himself, none of you.* This wasn’t just a war between the states for him—in the span of the past half hour, it had become so much more. It was a war against anyone who threatened Sam, anyone who dared try to come



## A HEART DIVIDED

between them. *My father did that once before. Never again.*

How could he tell Wiley that?

The answer was simple: he couldn't.

With a sigh, he looked past Wiley at the rebel camp. Most of the men were asleep by this hour—those who had stared at the sound of his voice had returned to their own business. They hunkered down by the low flames of smoldering campfires, lost in games of chance or the Bible or their own minds, wherever it was they went to get away from the poverty of the camp and the horrors of the war. In another month, another battle, these men might be dead—even now, most looked like nothing more than skeletons, shadows of their former selves, ghosts of who they used to be before the fighting began.

Andy knew he himself was one of them, thinner than he had been three years ago, used to going hungry and freezing in the ill-fitting uniform he wore. Sam, too. *We need to get out of here*, Andy told himself, frowning at the camp around them. *Head west and forget about the war, forget about everything but the two of us, just as Sam had once promised. Would that be so bad? Just leave all this behind and take up together somewhere beyond the fighting and the hatred and the politics.*

Cautiously, he asked, "What if they aren't all dead?"

Wiley shrugged. "You said yourself they were."

"I didn't check every single body," Andy replied. "I'm sure there's one or two out there, feigning when I came by, afraid I'd kill them if I knew they were still alive."

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

“Then we’ll have prisoners,” Wiley said. “I don’t know, Andy, whatever McNair wants to do with them. If they’re out there on that battlefield, they’re just as good as dead.”

*Except for Sam*, Andy amended silently. Turning away, he pushed through the flap of his tent. “I’ll not go.”

Wiley started to protest, but Andy glared at him over one shoulder, silencing him. “I’ve been to that field, Wiley. I’ve walked among those men. They lost their lives and I’ll not be the one to strip them of their dignity, as well. Goodnight.”

As the canvas fell into place behind him, Andy stood just inside his tent, holding his breath, waiting. He thought Wiley would have something more to say, and he waited for the knock he knew would come.

But when he heard footsteps leading away from his tent, he sighed in relief. He didn’t need the lieutenant to bother him as he gathered supplies to return to Sam.

## CHAPTER 6

Andy emptied his haversack onto his cot. It contained everything he carried that was sacred to him—Mary’s letters from home, Sam’s one missive from St. Louis with the promise of *soon* scrawled at the bottom in dark ink, a lock of his sister’s hair, a deck of cards, his mother’s Bible, and all the money he’d managed to save from his pay since joining the army. Sam’s letter went back into the haversack, along with the money. Unlike other soldiers, Andy never spent every paycheck on alcohol and food and women. He bought what he absolutely needed to in order to survive, what he couldn’t live without, and the rest of his pay was tucked away, ready for the day when he would head west in search of his lover.

## A HEART DIVIDED

*Only he's here now.*

In the familiar setting of his darkened tent, it was hard to believe the man he loved more than any other now sat less than a mile away. Andy felt as if everything before this hour—every battle, every fight, every moment of every day he'd spent in the service of the Confederacy and, while he was at it, his entire *life*—it had all been a preface to this evening. From here on, his life would begin anew, and he'd finally live out the story he'd been dreaming about since he first met Sam all those years ago.

He stripped the blankets from his cot, tossing them over his personals just in case anyone glanced inside his tent during the night and wondered why his effects littered an empty bed. The last thing he needed was to arouse suspicions now. The tiny snip of candle went in the haversack, followed by the hard biscuits from Andy's dinner. He wrapped them into strips of cloth bandages to keep them clean.

For a few moments he considered pouring the soup into a canteen, but the scant chunks of meat and small potatoes would never fit through the narrow opening at the mouth of the container. He settled for filling an old tonic bottle with the cold soup—he was able to get all the chunks in, which he thought might fill Sam up better than just the tepid broth. Tightening the lid to ensure it wouldn't leak, he slipped it into the haversack, along with the bowl and spoon and the canteen, filled with fresh water from the pitcher on his desk. A half-empty bottle of whiskey he kept hidden beneath his pillow followed suit.

## A HEART DIVIDED

Packed, he stepped back and took a long look around the small tent, trying to think of anything else Sam might need. *The cot*, he thought ruefully, but surely *that* would look odd, wouldn't it? His leaving the camp in the middle of the night dragging a cot along behind him. He could hear the pickets now... *Where are you taking that?*

What would he say? *Just going to sleep out here with the ghosts. You keep up your watch. I'll be back at dawn.*

The thought made him grin.

Slinging his haversack over one shoulder, he picked up the lantern and hurried from the tent. The regiment's hospital was a low wooden building on the other side of camp, and Andy kept an eye out for Wiley as he headed that way. He didn't want to run into him again, not when Sam waited for his return. As he neared the hospital, he heard soft cries from the men inside, soldiers wounded in battle or sick with typhus and dying on the thin cots. Mendenhall's small tent was nearby, the flaps open to visitors despite the late hour. Leaning inside, Andy rapped on the canvas and called out, "Doc?"

No one answered.

Andy ducked his head inside. The tent was empty, lit by a single unattended candle that sat atop an old traveling trunk. The light cast a warm glow over the narrow cot and the apothecary chest that housed Mendenhall's supplies. With a quick glance behind him to ensure no one in the camp was watching, Andy slipped between the open flaps and lowered his voice. "Doc Mendenhall? You in here?"

Apparently not.

## A HEART DIVIDED

Working quickly, Andy stood in front of the apothecary chest, opening drawers and rooting through their contents in search of what he wanted. *This is thievery, plain and simple*, he admonished himself, but was it that far a cry from what the soldiers would do tomorrow, rooting through the dead?

Though he knew Sam needed the supplies, Andy's conscience ate at him. *It's come to this, has it?* Mendenhall was probably at the hospital, checking on his patients. If Andy were lucky, he'd find what he needed and be gone before the surgeon ever knew he'd been there. And luck was on his side tonight, wasn't it? Because he had found Sam, his lover was still alive, and soon they'd be together again...

"Looking for something, Lieutenant?"

Andy whirled around as Mendenhall entered the tent. A tall man with lank hair that hung in a straight sheet around his narrow face, the surgeon seemed to tower over him. *A trick of the lighting, that's all*, Andy assured himself. By the candlelight Mendenhall's eyes looked dark and glassy like the beaded eyes of a doll, and Andy couldn't tell if that were a hint of a smile or a shadow crossing his face. No emotion was writ on those thin features, neither anger nor amusement.

Cautiously, Andy closed the drawer through which he'd been looking. With a wry grin, he stepped away from the apothecary chest. "Doc, hey. I was looking for you, actually."

"Really?" One of Mendenhall's eyebrows rose. Amused, then, Andy guessed. He stood in front of the tent's open flaps, blocking the only exit, and watched Andy carefully. "I'm not in the chest, I'm sorry to say."

## A HEART DIVIDED

“So I noticed.” Andy cleared his throat and tried to look past the surgeon out into the camp. The few men he had seen around their fires early were now gone, perhaps turned in for the night. In the resulting silence that draped the camp, it felt as if the world had narrowed to just the two of them, alone and facing off across the span of the small tent.

*But one shout and men will come running*, Andy reminded himself, gauging Mendenhall’s easy stance. *The wrong move and he’ll have me arrested, lieutenant stripes or not. He saw me digging through his supplies, as low as they are, and he has more than enough evidence...*

Andy couldn’t afford being held prisoner, not when Sam needed him. With a sigh, he said, “This isn’t what you think.”

That half-smile again, those unreadable eyes. Mendenhall held Andy’s gaze. “What do I think?”

Andy bit his lower lip, indecisive. *Sam awaits...* “I need ether.”

Mendenhall’s grin widened. “I never pegged you as an addict.”

“I’m not,” Andy countered. “I need it for a friend.”

Mendenhall didn’t move. How many other soldiers had he come upon during the war, rummaging through the apothecary chest seeking any relief from the fight? Ether, chloroform, or some other escapist drug.

Speaking quickly, Andy explained, “He’s wounded. I need ether and sutures and some gauze to wrap the wound, as well as something to pick out the bullet.”

Mendenhall shook his head. “I can’t give you that.” Andy

## A HEART DIVIDED

frowned, but before he could ask why not, Mendenhall continued. "These are my supplies, Lieutenant. These are for our boys when they fall on the field. You know we're strapped as it is—this lot has to last me the rest of the month, and I'm already down to my last bottle of ether. It's my duty to see that these supplies go to our men—"

"It's your duty to keep men alive," Andy said, his voice rising dangerously. "There's a man who will die if he isn't treated—"

"Take me to him," Mendenhall said.

Andy turned away, toying with the toggle on his haversack. From the corner of his eye, he saw the surgeon nod as if he had expected as much.

Quietly, Mendenhall mused, "You went out to the battlefield and said the men were all dead. I've heard the talk, I know what happened. What you say happened. And now you're here, looking for medical supplies, and you didn't ask me so I can only guess at your reasons. Am I safe in assuming the ghost that scared the pickets is a Union soldier?"

Andy frowned, unable to meet the surgeon's eyes. *Damn you*, he thought bitterly. *Damn you all to hell, Mendenhall, for piecing this together.*

In that same, low voice, the surgeon asked, "Is it a brother, perhaps? A cousin, a friend? Tell me, Lieutenant. Tell me who's out there in the dark waiting for you to return."

For a moment Andy considered not answering. He could go back to his tent and find the mending kit he kept beneath his cot, and stitch Sam together again with nothing more than



## *A HEART DIVIDED*

common household thread and a thin, unsterilized needle. Give him the whiskey to dull the pain, and when he was finished, wrap the wound in the tattered cloth he'd used to store the biscuits.

But the fear of infection kept him from pushing past Mendenhall out of the tent.

"I'll pay you for the supplies," Andy whispered. At the surgeon's frown, he dug into his haversack and fingered the money he had saved for the past three years. "I need ether—not the whole bottle, just enough for one man while he's being stitched together. Sutures, a needle, some gauze."

Mendenhall didn't speak, and Andy raised his gaze to meet those dark, haunted eyes. "How much would that be worth to you?"

With a laugh, the surgeon said, "You haven't the money. I can't just give those things away—"

"Nine dollars," Andy bartered. When Mendenhall's eyes widened, he pulled the money from his haversack and held it out to prove he had it. "Half a month's wages, and just for enough supplies to tend to one man. Half a month's pay, and I'll throw in another dollar for your silence, as well. No one is to know."

Mendenhall cleared his throat. "Where did you get that?" he asked, staring openly at the money clenched in Andy's fist. "If it's stolen—"

"It's not," Andy assured him. "I've saved it from my own pay. It's legit, I promise you."

Mendenhall met Andy's gaze, uncertainty flickering in the

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

depths of his doll-like eyes. But greed shone there, as well. Ten dollars was a small fortune in these troubled times.

“Please,” Andy pleaded. “It’s your duty to heal, is it not? You took that oath, and I’m paying for the supplies. You don’t have to know anything more than that. If you give them to me, you’ll have saved a man tonight. Does it matter the color of his coat? He’s human, Mendenhall, just like you and me, and he needs attention.”

“Who is he?” Mendenhall asked with a laugh. “General Grant himself? Who’s out in those woods that you’d risk your rank to save him? That you’d spend half a month’s pay to make sure he lives? Who is he to you?”

“I can’t tell you that,” Andy replied.

Mendenhall’s eyes hardened. “Then how am I to believe you?”

Andy held out his fist full of dollars. “Please, Doc. Take the money.”

“This is treasonous,” Mendenhall muttered.

After a moment’s indecision, he stepped toward Andy, away from the tent’s entrance. Andy’s heart swelled with relief. Taking the offered dollars, Mendenhall balled the money into a fist and shouldered Andy aside. “Ether?” he asked, opening one of the lower drawers on the apothecary chest. “Sutures and gauze and what else do you think you might need? No one is to know.”

“No,” Andy agreed, watching Mendenhall gather the supplies. “Something to dig out the bullet? What are those things called?” Mendenhall held up a metal probe, shaped like

*A HEART DIVIDED*

a slender pair of scissors with a blunted tip, and Andy nodded. "Those."

Mendenhall dropped the items into Andy's open haversack, no longer meeting his gaze.

Andy lowered his voice to whisper, "Thank you."

"I'm a surgeon," Mendenhall replied. "It's my duty."

But he didn't return the money.

## CHAPTER 7

With Mendenhall's supplies tucked away in his haversack, Andy slipped from the surgeon's tent and kept to the edges of the camp, away from the dying light of the fires to avoid being seen. He kept his lantern close to his body, shielding the light with his haversack, and walked with his head down to avoid confronting anyone. The last thing he needed was Wiley or McNair to stop him, or one of the pickets to call him out...

As he neared the camp's perimeter, he crouched down in the bushes and moved as quietly as he could. The men would still be jumpy, and Andy didn't relish the questions his second leaving might arouse. But the hour had grown later than he thought, and as Andy approached, he could hear the pickets

## A HEART DIVIDED

changing duty. The new soldiers were busy picking on Lovelace for his fear of nightly ghosts, and even Williams laughed at his messmate's earlier behavior. Under the cover of the men's jeering laughter, Andy broke through the bushes at a crouch, his lantern tucked between his side and his haversack, and he kept low to the ground to remain unseen as he hurried by.

He didn't breathe again until he was inside the woods.

There he pressed against the trunk of a tree to catch his breath. For long minutes he waited, listening to the rush of the scant breeze in the leaves and the raucous calls of the men behind him. Had they seen him? Andy didn't think so, but his heart hammered in his chest and he couldn't hear much over it. What if they were even now sneaking into the woods, rifles drawn? Or what if they followed him to Sam? *What if...*

All he heard was the wind through the leaves, that silvery sound that reminded him of the rushing river back home. When his heart finally calmed down, he pushed away from the tree. A glance over his shoulder assured him he was alone. Still, he kept the lantern shielded as he began to retrace his steps.

The trip back to the clearing was quicker this time, now that Andy knew where he was headed. When the trees started to thin out, he held out his lantern so Sam could see his face as he approached. He kept his gaze on the ground, careful not to tread on the dead. A little way into the field, he heard the soft click of a rifle hammer.

"Sam?" he called out.

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

“Here,” came the reply.

He followed the sound of Sam’s voice and found his lover with the rifle across his lap. “You brought food?”

Andy nodded. Setting the lantern aside, he opened the haversack and handed Sam the hard biscuits.

“God,” Sam sobbed, tearing into the bread with his teeth. “I love you.”

Andy laughed as he poured the soup into its bowl. “You’d say that to anyone right now, I think, as long as they had something to eat.”

Sam laughed, his eyes widening at the soup. “Damn,” he whimpered. “You’re too good to me.”

“It’s cold,” Andy warned as Sam reached for the bowl.

“I don’t care,” Sam replied. “It’s food. Give me it.”

With a hint of a smile, Andy admonished, “Say please.”

A look of pure frustration crossed Sam’s face, and Andy laughed.

“Please?” he asked, as if he’d never heard the word before.

Without waiting for Andy to answer, Sam reached for the bowl again. This time Andy handed it over. As Sam shoveled cold soup into his mouth, he muttered, “That wasn’t funny. You’d have me starve—”

“Oh, hush.” Andy kissed Sam’s temple roughly and smoothed the dirty strands of red-gold hair back from his brow. “I’ve missed you.”

Sam looked at him. Swallowing a mouthful of soup, he sighed. “I’ve thought of you every second of every day for the last three years. I got as far as St. Louis and was working for

## A HEART DIVIDED

an outfitter, cleaning horses and shodding a bit, saving my money to send for you.”

“Why didn’t you?” Andy wanted to know. “Daily I’ve waited for some word, a letter or a ticket, *something*...”

“I wanted to,” Same assured him. He raised the bowl to his lips and gulped down the rest of the soup, using the spoon to guide the chunks of beef and potatoes into his mouth. When the bowl was empty, he handed it back to Andy and tore into the bread again. “The place I stayed took most of my pay for room and board, and I didn’t want to go any farther west, even though the cowboys all told me that’s where the money was. Texas maybe, out that way. A horser like me can make it big on one of the ranches, but I didn’t want to get any farther away from you if I could help it.”

Andy took one of Sam’s hands in his. Pressing the cold knuckles to his face, he sighed. “I was ready to follow you. I had some money, not much, and I was going to sell my part of the farm back to my daddy when he said I should sign up for the war. I didn’t want to, but the money would help out. I did the math—I could make enough to come after you myself, if I saved right.”

With a laugh, Sam said, “That’s why I joined. A recruiter came through town and offered a bonus for signing up with him. Three hundred dollars.” Andy whistled and Sam laughed again. “It’s in a bank account in your name, out in St. Louis. All three hundred, and whatever I’ve managed to save along the way since then. I have a letter there, too, and instructions that say if I die or the money stops coming in monthly, they’re

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

to mail the letter to you.”

“What’s it say?” Andy thought he might know, and he kissed the back of Sam’s hand.

“It says I love you,” Sam replied. “It says the money is yours if I don’t live through the war.”

“You will,” Andy assured him. Letting Sam’s hand fall to his lap, he began to empty the haversack. As he unpacked its contents, he held each up to Sam for inspection. “Your letter. I read it every day.”

Sam squeezed Andy’s thigh. “You don’t.”

“I could recite it for you. Each word is written on my heart.” Tucking the missive back into his haversack carefully, he grabbed what money remained at the bottom and showed the dollars to Sam. “My own pay. Confederate money, and with the inflation, not worth as much as I’d like, but it’s a goodly sum. I only live off a few dollars a month. But I had to pay for these.”

He shook out the bundle of medical supplies Mendenhall had given him, wrapped in gauze that the surgeon had suggested he use to bandage the wound. When Sam didn’t say anything, Andy looked up to find his lover’s eyes glazed with fear. “Don’t worry. He told me what to do.”

“It’s going to hurt,” Sam whispered. “I mean, it hurts now, but you’re really going to do this, right? Dig around inside and sew me up and...”

“I can do it,” Andy assured him.

Sam gave him a dubious look and swallowed thickly. “Jesus.”



## *A HEART DIVIDED*

Andy held up a small vial. "I have ether, and morphine for when that wears off. Just relax. It could be worse." At Sam's skeptical frown, he added, "It could get infected, and then you'd have to amputate—"

"Okay," Sam said quickly, cutting off that thought. He looked around them at the darkness and asked, "You want to do it right here? Now? A few hours more and it'll be morning. Can't it wait until then?"

But Andy shook his head. "They're sending a patrol out in the morning," he told Sam, pouring the ether onto the strip of cloth that had once held the biscuits. "They'll take you prisoner and I'll not have that. We've got to get you out of here before then."

"I can't walk," Sam reminded him.

Before his courage could desert him, Andy cupped his hand behind Sam's neck. His fingers twined through the strands of hair at his lover's nape, and he took a moment to smooth them down, stroking the soft skin. "I love you."

"And I you," Sam whispered. His eyes were wide with fear, and he gripped Andy's wrist as if to hold back the ether-soaked cloth. "Kiss me."

Andy did, brushing away bread crumbs that clung to Sam's lips. His tongue tasted like the soup Andy hadn't been able to stomach earlier. Now he kissed the last drops away, massaging Sam's neck and shoulders as he did so. "Lie back."

Sam shifted until he reclined against the fallen log behind him. When Andy raised the cloth to his face, Sam tightened his grip for a second, then relaxed. His eyes slipped shut as

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

Andy pressed the cloth to his nose.

"Breathe deep," Andy instructed.

Sam nodded. Beneath his hand, Andy felt warm breath against the wet cloth, and he ran his other hand through Sam's hair. Those eyes opened again, wide, fearful, but Andy held Sam's gaze and didn't look away. "It's okay," he promised. "It will be fine, trust me."

"I do," Sam whispered, the words muffled beneath the cloth. "Andy?"

"Don't speak," Andy told him. "You're fighting it."

Sam shook his head, a weak gesture. "I'm not. I just want—"

Andy sighed. "Sammy, don't. Just let it work."

The hand on his wrist relaxed, and Andy pressed the cloth more firmly against Sam's nose. His lover's words were muffled. "I want you to talk to me. Say something, anything. I've missed the sound of your voice."

With a faint grin, Andy smoothed the hair back from Sam's brow. Faint freckles dotted Sam's nose, standing out in sharp contrast against his pale skin. His head rested back on the log now, and Andy let his fingers relearn the curve of his lover's face, the strong jaw, the aquiline nose, the high cheekbones that now made him look harrowed and gaunt. "I've written a hundred letters to you in my mind," Andy murmured. "And now that you're here, I don't remember one single word I wanted to say."

"Tell me," Sam sighed.

Andy kissed the tip of his nose, catching a heady whiff of

## A HEART DIVIDED

the sweet-smelling anesthetic in the process. “They were lovesick letters, each one worse than the last. You’d think me a dandy.”

Sam snickered beneath his hand. “I’d not.”

“Sleep,” Andy cajoled. As if on his command, Sam’s blinking grew slower, and it seemed an effort to open his eyes each time they slipped shut. After another few moments, they closed and stayed closed. His hand went limp, falling from Andy’s wrist to rest on his thigh. His breathing slowed, evening out beneath the cloth.

Mendenhall had warned Andy of the ether—he wasn’t to use much, just enough to drop Sam into sleep, and then he was to set the cloth aside to let Sam breathe naturally. The drug would wear off on its own in ten minutes, fifteen tops. Andy had to work fast. He repositioned the lantern to cast a bright light on Sam’s leg, the short stub of candle working hard to push back the night. One deep breath to steady himself, and he turned his attention to the wound.

Using his pocketknife, he cut into Sam’s pants, peeling the fabric away from the ragged wound. *Please let it be a minié ball that hit him*, he prayed as he worked, tearing the bloodied material. *If it’s grapeshot, I can’t stitch that. Please don’t let it be grapeshot, God. I’m begging here.*

With the fabric cleared away, Andy could see the wound—it was a thick, ugly scrape down Sam’s thigh. It didn’t *look* like grapeshot, not from what he had seen of the damage the ammunition caused other soldiers while in battle, and it didn’t appear to be too deep, either.

## A HEART DIVIDED

Grimacing, Andy picked at the torn flesh, caked with dried blood, and frowned when the wound opened again. Dark blood ran black and glistened in the lamplight. On second thought, it was deeper than it looked. Using the tweezers Mendenhall had given him, Andy poked at the wound—Sam hissed in discomfort, but the ether dulled most of the pain.

Andy saw no bone...and no bullet, neither the solid slug of a minié ball nor the scattered pellets of grapeshot. The tweezers only prodded soft muscle and clotted blood. It looked like a clean shot. The bullet must have just grazed Sam, that was all. Reaching for the whiskey, Andy assured himself, *I can stitch this. He'll be okay.*

Sam cried out once as Andy poured whiskey onto the wound to clean it. The blood appeared to boil, the whiskey eliciting a thin pus that hissed as it ran from the wound. Bending close to the lantern, Andy threaded one of Mendenhall's curved needles and tied a thick knot at the end of the thread. It would be just like mending a shirt.

A bloody shirt that would feel each prick of the needle, each tug of the thread.

*Stop it.*

Raising the whiskey bottle to his lips, Andy drank down a long swallow and tried to steel his stomach for the task ahead. He could do this. Sam would be fine. His mother had taught him how to mend before she passed on, and Mary often made him do his own darning. This was nothing different. Mending, nothing more.

Andy ground his teeth and took a steadying breath. The

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

whiskey curled down his throat to warm his belly. He felt it in his blood, invigorating his arms, clearing his mind. Moving the lantern closer, he pinched the skin around the wound together—blood and whiskey ran over his trembling fingers. As Andy eased the needle through the skin, Sam moaned in pain.

The needle curved beneath the wound and through the other side with surprising ease. Andy pulled the thread slowly, until the knot caught. *Not that hard, actually.* He spared a glance at Sam. His lover's eyes were shut tight, his cheeks taut and flushed, and a fine sheen of sweat covered his forehead. His lower lip was caught between his teeth, his brow furrowed.

"You're doing great, Sammy," Andy whispered, bending back over the wound. "Just a little while longer, that's it, and I'll have you all fixed up."

Sam gripped Andy's knee weakly as his lover sewed shut the wound in his thigh.

## CHAPTER 8

When he was finished stitching the wound, Andy's fingers were slick with blood and ached. The needle's imprint had dug into his forefinger and thumb, leaving behind a small gulley when he picked it out. Tying off the thread, he leaned down and bit it off, as close to Sam's skin as he could get. Then he poured more whiskey over the black stitches to clean away the blood.

Beside him, Sam cried out. The anesthetic had worn off during the last few moments Andy worked at the wound. He'd ignored the sharp intake of breath and the hand clutching his leg as he hurried to finish. Now he took that cold hand in both his own to warm it as he studied the wound.

## A HEART DIVIDED

In the glow of the lantern, the puckered flesh blazed angrily. It looked as dark as thunderclouds before a storm, bruised and tender. Gently Andy set Sam's hand down to clean the wound with the ether-soaked strip of cloth, wiping away whiskey and blood. Once dry, he pressed a clean bandage over the stitches and wrapped the gauze around Sam's leg, over his pants. He pulled it as tight as he dared, then used the water from his canteen to clean his hands. A glance at the sky showed the moon had barely budged from its position above them. Though the candle guttered low in Andy's lantern, the surgery hadn't taken very long at all.

Drying his hands on his shirt, he called out softly, "Sam? How are you doing?"

Sam moaned, his hand fisting at Andy's knee. "God," he sobbed, his voice thick as if he spoke around a mouth full of cotton. His eyes blinked once, unfocused, and then closed. "Hurts."

"I know." Andy wiped Sam's palm clean of his own bloody handprint, then dug into his haversack for the bottle of syrup Mendenhall had given him.

*"Morphine," the surgeon had said. "Use it sparingly, if at all. Don't let him have the bottle. Don't leave it unattended, do you follow?"*

Andy had heard of the dangers of the drug—he'd seen what it did to men who fell into its siren embrace. He wouldn't let that happen to Sam. Unscrewing the cap, he poured a tiny amount of the thick liquid onto a small spoon. "Here," he said, pressing the spoon to Sam's lips. "Take this. It should help."

## A HEART DIVIDED

Sam swallowed reflexively, grimacing at the bitter taste. “Andy.”

The name was just a sigh, so full of pain that Andy wanted to tip the whole bottle into Sam’s mouth to alleviate it. With difficulty, he forced himself to recap the bottle, and shoved both it and the spoon deep into the bottom of his haversack. Sam’s fingers tightened around Andy’s knee and his head lolled to one side to watch, though he didn’t seem capable of keeping his eyes open for long. With each breath, his chin dropped lower, until it rested on his shoulder.

Unbuttoning his shirt, Andy used the hem of it to wipe away the grime covering Sam’s face. The fabric was damp from the water with which Andy had washed up and left behind swaths of clean skin with each pass. When his face was cleared of dirt and mud, Andy started on his neck, wiping away the dust from the woods. Then his wrists and hands, each finger rubbed gently between Andy’s own until they were clean as well.

Sam’s breath grew labored and uneven, large gulps as if his body protested each draw of air. *I should head back to camp, on the off-chance that someone might be looking for me*, Andy thought as he packed away the rest of the medical supplies into his haversack. Wiley could return to his tent to apologize, or Mendenhall might go to McNair...

Andy shook those thoughts away. Mendenhall would stay quiet—he had been bought and he’d not betray Andy. He *couldn’t*, because he’d taken money for the supplies. How well would that reflect upon him?



## A HEART DIVIDED

Not so good, Andy suspected.

And anything that might befall Andy after leaving the camp would land on the surgeon's shoulders as well, for supplying him. Also, the hour was late—Andy sensed it might be after midnight, though he had no way of knowing. The pocket watch his father had given him when he enlisted wasn't kept among his prized possessions, tucked instead in the depths of his footlocker. It hadn't been something he'd thought to take when he left.

No matter the time, the fact was he simply couldn't leave Sam, not like this. Half-drugged, with a deeper pain settling in, his whole body vulnerable and defenseless. With careful movements, he sat beside Sam and draped an arm around his lover's shoulders. Mindful of his wound, Andy pulled him close and turned Sam's head to rest it against his chest. One hand smoothed down his lover's chest, plucking randomly at the buttons on his uniform; the other stroked back the hair from his damp brow. *I could take him back to my tent. Let him have my cot, let Mendenhall take a look at him in the morning when the rest of the camp is gone. I can keep him hidden, at least until he gets better.*

But that would mean he had to somehow get Sam through the woods, then past the pickets, then through the camp itself unnoticed. He knew he couldn't do that. Not in the best of circumstances, and sure as hell not with Sam wounded. Both men were of average build, with muscles forged by hard work on the farm. But they stood about the same height and, despite Sam's weakened appearance, Andy suspected they might

## A HEART DIVIDED

weigh about the same. Sam had always been slightly heavier than Andy. When they had been boys, wrestling in the barn, Sam was bigger then and had always managed to pin Andy to the ground.

*Then he'd straddle my hips and hold my hands above my head, and kiss me breathless.*

Andy smiled at the memory. Even at his best, he'd never be able to carry Sam far. Leaning down, he pressed his lips to Sam's in a brief kiss and tasted the bitter sting of morphine. No, best to let him stay here and rest. The last thing Andy wanted was to jostle his leg and reopen the wound. He'd managed to stitch it once. He didn't think he had the strength in him to do it a second time.

For a while he held Sam to him, waiting for the ether to wear off. The candle in the lantern burned dangerously low, and Andy doubted there was enough wax in there to last until morning. He didn't relish the thought of sitting in the darkness, not when dawn would bring his own men from the camp. He still needed to get Sam as far away from the battlefield as he could before the sun rose. But how was he going to do that? *God, what am I supposed to do now?*

He didn't know.

Some time later he felt Sam's hand clench at his belt. "Andy?" he asked, his voice groggy from the medication.

"Right here." Andy turned Sam's face up to his and stared into his lover's eyes, dark and dulled by pain and morphine. Forcing a smile, he kissed the furrowed skin between Sam's eyebrows. "It's going to be okay. I stitched the wound and I'm

## A HEART DIVIDED

no surgeon, but I've seen enough in battle to think it looks like it's going to heal fine. Does it hurt?"

Sam nodded. "A little," he admitted. "I can't really feel it, but I know it *should* hurt. Like it hurt for so long, it can't stop, you know?"

Andy laughed. "Well, it's going to hurt like the dickens when the syrup wears off, I reckon." Kissing Sam again, he added, "I know you can't walk, but men from my camp will be heading out this way in a few hours to scavenge from the dead. I'd rather not be here when they arrive."

"Me either." Sam sighed. "Maybe I can walk, just a little bit, if you help me."

But Andy shook his head. "Where will we go?"

The more he thought about it, the more it seemed ludicrous to return to the camp. *Deserters are shot*, a voice in the back of his mind whispered. But he hadn't deserted, had he? He would return when he had to, when Sam was safe. Surely that didn't count as deserting. *As long as I know he's safe, I can wait out the rest of my term. I just have a few more months left before I'm up for re-enlistment. I'll cut my losses, take the last of my pay, and find him again.*

But where?

He thought of the wounded in his own regiment, and where they'd gone to recover. "There's a hospital in Richmond. Chimborazo. Not far from here."

Sam shook his head, settling it into a more comfortable position against Andy's chest. "All they'll do is stitch me up, and I'm already stitched. So they'll tell me to go back to my

## A HEART DIVIDED

regiment, if they don't take me prisoner first." In a small voice, he added, "I've heard tales of Libbie Prison. I'll not die there."

"Where is your regiment?" Andy asked. Maybe he could take Sam back *there*, get the Union sawbones to take a look at his leg, maybe discharge him for the rest of the war.

Sam sighed. "I'm not sure. Retreating, is all I know."

He fell silent, and Andy was all too aware of the heaviness of Sam's head against his chest, the slight movement of his lover's body on his with every breath he took. If only they could lie like this forever, ignore the dead around them and forget the war itself. The two of them together, alone...was that too much to ask?

Just when Andy thought Sam must've drifted off to sleep, his lover murmured, "We passed a cabin a while back."

"Where?" Andy sat up, suddenly interested, and frowned at Sam's slight gasp of pain. He kissed Sam's cheek as his hands caressed his lover's fevered brow. "I'm sorry. Oh God, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to do that. I know you're hurt. I'm so sorry—"

"It's okay," Sam told him, sitting up as well. He held his head with one hand as if afraid it would roll away if he let go. "It wasn't even a whole cabin any more, just a bunch of logs that had burned down years ago. The whole place is abandoned. We checked it out, thinking it might be set up as an ambush, but it was empty. Just a small cabin, no roof, barely any floor."

"But safe," Andy said.

## A HEART DIVIDED

Sam nodded.

Andy persisted, "You'll be able to rest there, right?" Another nod. "And it's close enough that I can slip away from my camp and check on you?"

Sam nodded again. "It isn't far. A mile maybe, if that. Back that way."

He pointed into the darkness behind him, at the woods beyond the battlefield. For a moment Andy stared into the darkness, undecided. *That way...* out where scouts believed the Union regiment had holed up after the fight, licking their wounds before attacking again.

*Sam's regiment.* God, had they squared off in the battlefield without realizing it? Andy tried to recall his position during the fight, but time had a way of getting away from him out here and he never could remember everything that happened to him in the midst of battle. The fighting was too intense, the moment a blur of gunpowder and blood. What if it had been *his* bullet that grazed Sam's leg? Sweet Lord above, what if he had killed the one man he loved without realizing the blue coat in his sights belonged to Sam?

He shook those troubling thoughts away. He couldn't dwell on that; if he did, his heart would burst. Sam was fine, he was here, now, with Andy. And there was a cabin a short distance away where Andy could leave him. Sam could prop himself up against one wall, rifle in his arms as he aimed for the door. He'd be safe and could mend there.

If they could *get* there.

"You think you might be able to walk?" he asked, standing

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

to stretch.

When he looked down, Sam's arms were raised toward him. "Help me up."

Andy bent and wrapped his arms around Sam's chest while his lover clung to his neck. With his good leg, Sam pushed himself up from the ground while Andy held him. His face blanched as he stood, teetering on one foot. "Jesus," he sighed, leaning heavily against Andy's shoulder. "I don't think I can do this, Andy. I don't. It hurts too damn much—"

"I know." But Andy didn't let him sit back down. Instead, he waited until Sam stood steady, then bent to retrieve his haversack and lantern. "But it's just a little ways away, isn't it? Didn't you say it wasn't far?"

"Yeah, but God." Sam's words ended in a sob, and when Andy stood, he found himself in a tight embrace. Against his neck, Sam breathed, "I can't. I just can't."

"You can," Andy told him. He held Sam close and kissed his lover's ear. "You have to. I'll help you, I promise I will. I'm right here, Sam. Right here. I'm not leaving you, okay?"

Sam's reply was another muffled sob against Andy's neck.

Andy pressed, "Okay?"

Sam nodded. "Yes," he sighed.

Andy ran one arm around his waist and Sam leaned against him, holding the foot of his wounded leg up off the ground. "You're not leaving me?"

"I'm not," Andy assured him.

"Then okay." Sam frowned in the scant light and pointed into the darkness. "This way."

## CHAPTER 9

The last of the candle's wick burned away before they reached the cabin. The light guttered, flickered once, and winked out. "It's okay," Andy said. He didn't know if it were Sam he tried to reassure, or himself.

Around them, the trees had taken on some substance in the darkness, but they still looked like gray ghosts barely indistinguishable from the night. Another few hours and it would be dawn. It seemed as though they'd spent half the night shuffling through dead leaves, brambles clawing at them like hungry children as they passed, the trees looming in and out of focus. To Andy's calculations, they'd already walked a mile or more. How much farther was the cabin in this

## A HEART DIVIDED

darkness?

With Sam's injury, the two men moved through the dense trees like a sluggish stream. Andy half-dragged, half-carried his lover, whose arm hung heavily around Andy's shoulders like a dead weight. Andy supported Sam with an arm around the waist, a hand clenched around the buckle of his belt, as if he could pull him along that way. Still, he didn't think they'd reach the cabin before the sun rose.

If there even *was* a cabin...

Part of Andy had begun to doubt that, as well. Hadn't they been walking long enough already? Surely they must have passed it some while back, missing it in the night. Or Sam's memory was wrong, addled by the drugs, and the cabin he remembered was one his regiment had passed months ago. It was an easy error, Andy reasoned, one he himself might make. The woods in this part of the country all looked the same.

His shoulders ached, a dull throb that tugged at him with each step they took. He'd shuffle forward and Sam would hop beside him, head buried in Andy's shoulder—already Andy's shirt was damp with sweat and his lover's silent tears. With each step they took, Sam's breath came in short gasps of exertion and pain. In a quiet voice Andy kept urging him on. "It's okay," he sighed as he shuffled forward, then waited for Sam to gather the strength to hop ahead. "We're almost there, Sammy. It's going to be okay. One more step. You can do it, come on. One more step."

Sometime after the lantern went out, Andy shuffled forward one final time and Sam didn't follow. He pressed his



## A HEART DIVIDED

face into Andy's shoulder and sobbed, unmoving. "I can't," he breathed. "I just can't. Don't make me."

"One more step, Sam," Andy told him. "You *can*."

"No," Sam gasped. "No."

Andy glanced behind them at the graying woods and frowned at the thick morning fog that was beginning to cling to the trees like a shroud. He didn't know how far they were from the battlefield, but the sun was rising and they weren't far enough for his tastes. "Come on, one more—"

"You keep *saying* that," Sam cried, covering his face with his hands. "No more, Andy. I can't do it anymore. I just can't."

Andy looked around, helpless. There was no cabin he could see—they were alone in the forest, the two of them the only people alive at this hour. Far away he heard birds, chirping at the sun, but the first rays of morning light didn't quite reach them yet. The woods were draped in a soupy gray fog that wouldn't disperse for a few hours more.

"Sam," Andy started.

Without warning, his lover went limp in his arms.

Andy turned and caught him before he fell to the ground. "Sam!"

"What?" Sam's cheeks were slack with pain, flushed with a heat that radiated from him in waves.

*Fever.*

Cautiously, Andy lowered Sam to the ground. His face and neck burned to the touch. That wasn't a good sign, was it? Andy didn't think so.

## A HEART DIVIDED

In a small voice, Sam whined, “Andy, I just *can’t*—”

“I know.” Andy leaned Sam against the trunk of a tall sapling and frowned as his lover’s head lolled to one side. He looked like a child’s rag doll, battered and torn and tossed away into the woods. “We’ll rest a minute.”

Sam nodded listlessly and Andy paused to catch his breath as he looked around them. His heart stuttered in his chest, adrenaline flooding his body. He’d never felt as useless as he did at this moment. Part of him expected to hear sounds of the Confederate Army at any second, men crashing through the woods toward the battlefield...were they far enough away that they wouldn’t be seen? They had been walking for hours, it seemed, but when the fog burned off, would they only find they hadn’t made it very far past the clearing at all?

“It hurts,” Sam sighed, picking at the gauze around his leg.

Andy stroked Sam’s cheek, gazing into emerald eyes reddened with pain as he rubbed a thumb over his lover’s chapped lips.

Sam’s mouth puckered into a half-hearted kiss. “God. It’s pulling my skin and it hurts so bad. I can feel the stitches pulling and they itch...”

Andy brushed Sam’s hand away from the gauze. A bright red spot had blossomed through the white bandage like a poppy in snow, and for a moment he thought maybe the stitches had split. *Please, no.* As quickly as he could, he unwrapped the wound.

When he lifted the bandage, he saw the black sutures still in place, the skin puffy where the thread bit into the skin, and

## A HEART DIVIDED

the bleeding wasn't as bad as he had feared. "It's okay," he said, covering the wound again. "It looks good, Sam. It's healing fine."

"It hurts," Sam replied, watching with hooded eyes as Andy rewrapped his leg.

"I can give you something for it," Andy suggested.

Mendenhall's voice echoed through his mind. *Use it sparingly*. Yeah, easy for him to say—he didn't have to watch the man he loved wracked with pain. Andy couldn't bear to look into Sam's red-rimmed eyes, not when he had something that could ease his discomfort.

Taking the morphine from his haversack, he dipped his forefinger into the bottle up to the first knuckle. That should be enough to calm the fever and dull the ache. Gently, he placed his fingertip against Sam's lips. "Not much. It's addictive."

Sam nodded as he opened his mouth, and Andy slipped his finger inside the hot, soft wetness. He felt Sam's tongue curl around his finger, sucking greedily, and when his eyes met Andy's, he grinned. "You take my breath away," Sam whispered as Andy eased his finger from between his lips.

"It's the drug," Andy replied, tucking the bottle back into his haversack. "Not me."

"Yes, you." Sam leaned forward until his forehead rested against Andy's. "Did I tell you I missed you?"

Andy laughed. "I think so."

"Did I tell you I love you?" Sam persisted.

Andy smirked as he cocked his head to one side, seeming

## A HEART DIVIDED

to think about the question. "I believe you did," he said at length. "Yes, I'm almost sure of it. I remember the word love, though you might have been talking about food at the time."

Despite his pain, Sam grinned. "Where's this damn cabin?"

Andy smiled. "It's *your* cabin," he said. "You tell me. I'm just following you."

"And I'm following you." Sam wrapped his arms around Andy's shoulders and sighed. "That can't be a smart thing to do."

Andy rubbed his hand along Sam's good thigh, his fingers remembering the feel of forgotten flesh, now hidden from view. "There *is* a cabin, isn't there?"

Sam nodded. "I think there is," he replied. "I'm almost sure of it."

"Then we'll find it," Andy assured him.

Sam closed his eyes, but not before a single tear slipped down his cheek.

Wiping the tear away, Andy pressed his lips together in a thin line. "Well," he suggested, caressing Sam's cheek with his thumb, "I don't want to leave you here by yourself, but if it's close by maybe I can just have a quick look around, what do you think? That way you can rest a bit..."

"Okay," Sam agreed. He gripped Andy's wrist and sighed. "Don't go far."

"I won't," Andy promised. "You holler if you need me, you hear?"

"Yeah." Sam pressed his lips to Andy's, the bitter taste of

## A HEART DIVIDED

medicine tainting their kiss. "I love you. You know that."

"I know." Rising to his feet, Andy tousled Sam's disheveled hair and forced himself to grin down at his lover. "Are you getting hungry?"

Sam shrugged. "A bit. Mostly I just want to sleep."

Over one shoulder, Andy carried Sam's rifle. Now he unslung it and set it in his lover's lap. "Be careful," he warned. "It's loaded."

"I don't need it." Sam shook his head when Andy pressed the gun into his hands. "I'm not... I can't aim, Andy. I'm too tired to shoot straight."

But Andy let go of the rifle's strap. "At least hold onto it for me. If anyone comes—"

"Who?" Sam wanted to know. "There's no one here but the two of us. Who's going to come along while you're gone?"

"Just take it." Andy started to walk away, but remembered the bottle of morphine in his haversack and came back.

For a moment he looked down at Sam, a faint smile on his lover's lips, and he toyed with the idea of digging into the bag to remove the morphine and what little remained of the ether.

But then Sam would think he didn't trust him. And how could he look at that smile and stare into those verdant eyes and not trust the man? He didn't want to see the hurt his distrust would put into that green gaze.

Andy *did* trust him, with his life. But the pain that shone brightly in those eyes, the blood that seeped through the bandage, the wound itself might make Sam do something

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

they'd both regret. There was only so much of the drug in that haversack, and Andy knew he couldn't buy any more.

Besides, Mendenhall had told him not to leave the bottle with Sam.

These conflicting thoughts warred in Andy's mind, causing him to stoop to retrieve the haversack that rested beside Sam.

Sam's smile disappeared like the sun behind clouds as Andy shouldered the bag. "You can leave that here."

"I know," Andy replied. "But what if my men come while I'm gone? If they see you with a haversack full of Confederate money, what'll they think? With these drugs, too."

"No one's coming," Sam told him.

"They will, give them time." With another smile that didn't quite reach his eyes, Andy turned away. "I'm going to have a look around. I hope I'm back before they arrive."

## CHAPTER 10

Andy moved through the woods like a ghost among the fog, wishing he had had the courage to leave the haversack with Sam. His lover would thank him when he recovered, Andy told himself, but that was little consolation now, when the memory of Sam's wounded eyes haunted him. His own mother had died from laudanum, and he wasn't going to see a similar addiction grip Sam until he was gone, too.

Because Sam wasn't going to die, Andy promised as he pushed through the low bushes as quietly as he could. His lover was in his care, and Andy wouldn't let him go without a fight. How many men were under his command? If he could keep them safe, then surely one lonely soldier would be easy.

## A HEART DIVIDED

His wound was stitched—Sam just needed time to recover. Then Andy would retire from the service and the two would head out west, together this time.

His dreams were too close to coming true to let him give up now.

Another step, and something cracked like a gunshot in the silence around him. Andy stumbled to his knees as his foot broke through a thin layer of leaves, plunging him into a shock of water. The sudden wetness soaked through his boot to numb his foot, and warm, swampy water swirled around his ankle through his sock. “God *damn* it,” he muttered.

*Have I mentioned I hate Virginia?*

It took a good, hard yank to pull his foot free from the murky water. The jerk sent him flailing to the ground. He hadn’t seen the marshy sinkhole, covered with a lacy veil of sticks and leaves. Now his foot was wet, his sock, his pants leg, *ugh*.

Rolling onto his back, Andy tore off his boot and sock, wringing them in his hands. The water that dripped from his sock smelled like sludge and snails and nasty green things he didn’t want to think about. *Why couldn’t I have been walking two inches to the left?* he mused, pulling the damp sock back over his foot. His skin had already grown clammy and cold. *Two inches, and I wouldn’t have fallen in this shit, is that too much to ask?*

*You’re lucky you didn’t break your damn leg,* his mind whispered.

He shuddered at the thought. A broken leg or twisted



## A HEART DIVIDED

ankle, and who would look after Sam then? How would Andy get back to the camp? Soldiers would come looking for him and they'd find the two of them together...*then* what?

*I didn't break it*, Andy assured himself, stubborn, as he pushed up off the ground. *I can handle a little water. I can live with the cold. I didn't—*

*The cabin.*

As he stood, he saw dark wood through the trees...the charred remains of a dwelling. *Sam's cabin*, the one he had been so sure existed. Andy forgot about his ankle as he stumbled out of the bushes for a closer look. The cabin was *real*, thank God.

Sam's description was right. The roof was gone, the door lost somewhere along the way, and one wall lay crumbled into a pile of deadwood that whistled dangerously when the wind blew. But when Andy stepped onto the porch, his boot heels clicked with a solid sound that echoed off the dusky interior. Inside, the wooden floor was mostly bare. A dark campfire pit in one corner suggested that others had used the cabin as a way station in the past, but the ashes were gray and cold like the dawn, the fire long since extinguished. Fallen limbs littered the floor atop a thick carpet of decaying leaves, but the corner by the gutted campfire was clear.

It would be the perfect place for Sam to rest. Just to be sure, Andy made his way around the cabin, searching for signs of other human life. But the grounds were bare, and Andy could see no regiments through the trees, neither Confederate nor Union camped nearby. With a wild *whoop!* Andy raced

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

back to where he had left Sam, careful to leap over the sinkhole where he'd fallen in earlier.

"I found it," he cried, breathless.

Sam sat where Andy had left him. His head drooped to his chest, and the rifle rested in his lap like a forgotten toy.

Skidding to a stop beside him, Andy fell to his knees and shook his lover gently. "Sam, I found it—your cabin, you're right, it's not far at all. I found it."

Sam roused himself. "The cabin?" he asked, his voice thick.

It was the morphine doing that to him. Andy stood and hauled Sam to his feet, draping both his lover's arms around his shoulders as he gripped him about the waist. "Come on, Sammy." He clenched his teeth against the dull pain that tore across his back as he tried to lift Sam's weight. "It's not far at all. You can make it."

"I can't," Sam said, but the protest was weak and half-hearted. When Andy bent for the rifle and lantern, Sam held onto his shirt, bunching the fabric in his fists to keep from falling. "Andy, I don't think I can do this."

"I know you can," Andy replied, swinging the rifle over his shoulder where it bumped against his haversack. "Not much farther. Come on."

Sam sighed, a weary sound that tore at Andy's heart, and he wondered if he had it in him to carry his lover to the cabin. But he hadn't slept all night, and his stomach rumbled because he hadn't eaten dinner. He wasn't at his best—right now his shoulders ached, his body hurt, his ankle throbbed...he knew

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

he couldn't lift Sam. "Come on," he whispered, rubbing the small of Sam's back as they started into the woods again. "When we get there, you can lie down, and I'll make you a nice fire, what do you say? You can sleep, and I'll go back to the camp and get us something to eat, and I'll give you a little more medicine, okay? How's that sound?"

Sam sighed again. "I can sleep?"

"You can," Andy said with a nod. "I won't wake you."

"Except to eat." Sam hopped once, almost stumbling, but Andy held onto him tightly and didn't let him fall. "Wake me up to eat."

Laughing, Andy watched the ground as they took another shuffling step. "Except to eat," he agreed.

With Sam in tow, it took Andy twice as long to return to the cabin. By the time they reached it, the sun had risen a little higher above the horizon and he could see the marshy sinkhole in the ground well before he accidentally stepped in it again. That was the last thing he needed—to pitch to his knees with Sam beside him, falling on his bad leg and tearing open the wound.

Avoiding the sinkhole, Andy led Sam around the bushes until they could see the hollowed husk of the cabin through the fog that was already beginning to burn away. "See? there it is."

Sam rolled his head back against Andy's shoulder to look up at the cabin.

Andy ran a hand through his lover's hair, pushing it back from his face. "You were right, it's there. See? Not far at all."

## A HEART DIVIDED

"I see." Sam's voice sounded dry and empty, each word as strained as the stitches in his thigh.

Somehow they made it up the few steps to the porch, and by the time they reached the darkened corner with the campfire remains, Andy had both arms around Sam, practically dragging him across the hardwood floor. With a sigh of relief, he lowered his lover to the ground, easing off Sam's heavy blue coat and folding it beneath his head for a makeshift pillow. The gauze around his thigh was bloodier than it had been before, and Andy knelt beside him, unwrapping the bandage carefully. He hated the bruised swelling around the stitches, and he wondered if he should somehow cut a little below the wound, just enough to bleed the pressure away. *But I don't know how to do that*, he reasoned, touching the tender skin experimentally. Sam hissed in pain, even though Andy's finger barely brushed along the wound. *Blood's pooling here and it'll infect, I know that much. Maybe I can prop his leg up to drain it a bit.*

Looking around the cabin, he spotted a thick tree limb, fallen some time during the past winter and rotting into dry wood on the cabin floor. Stripping the small branches from its length, Andy dragged the limb over to where Sam lay and positioned it beneath his lover's knee so his foot rested at one end. The limb raised his leg a little, and Andy hoped it might be enough to alleviate the swelling.

"The medicine," Sam sighed. His hands twisted in his shirt as he looked at Andy with half-lidded eyes, shiny with pain.

Andy wrapped the wound again, not as tightly as before,

## A HEART DIVIDED

and retrieved the bottle of morphine from his haversack. "Here," he said, helping Sam sit up enough to sip from the bottle. As soon as his lips touched the cool glass, though, Andy pulled it away. "Not too much," he cautioned.

"I didn't get any," Sam replied, but the dark syrup spotted his lips and when his tongue licked out, it was coated with the drug. With pleading eyes he looked up at Andy. "Please?"

"No." Andy capped the bottle as Sam fell back to the ground, his head landing heavily on his coat.

"Fuck you," Sam muttered. Then his eyes went wide and he turned toward him, terrified. "I didn't mean that. Oh Jesus, Andy, I didn't mean it, I'm so sorry, I didn't. It's the pain."

Biting his lower lip, Andy nodded. "I know." The words still stung. "I'd give you another dose but it'll just make you want more, you know that."

"I do," Sam agreed with a weary sigh. He tapped a spot right over his heart. "Sometimes I wish the bullet had caught me here."

Andy closed his eyes against sudden tears. *Don't say that. Please, Sam, don't even think that. Don't wish it—I don't want to lose you.*

With a sad little laugh, Sam added, "Then I remember you're here with me and it's not so bad. I can live through this because I know you're going to be right here with me until the end."

## CHAPTER 11

Andy took the haversack and lantern with him as he hurried back to his encampment. Despite the morning sun, thick fog still draped the woods, and he heard men from his regiment somewhere up ahead as he approached the battlefield. As silently as possible, he skirted the clearing, keeping to the trees and bushes to avoid discovery. He thought he heard McNair's reedy voice among the soldiers, and at one point Wiley called out for the men to stay together. The sound of digging filled the air, ringing off the trees and fog until it seemed to be coming from everywhere at once, a hundred shovels crunching through dirt and rocky soil as the men buried the dead. At least they *were* burying them, Andy

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

thought as he edged away from the sounds. That small measure of respect almost made up for the fact the men robbed the corpses where they lay.

As he neared the camp, he heard the pickets talking softly to themselves. The low voices were distorted by the fog, making it hard for Andy to judge their position. But they couldn't see him, either, and he managed to stumble past them by mere feet without being caught. Once inside the perimeter of the camp, the fog didn't get much better, but almost all the men were out in the battlefield this morning and he didn't run into anyone on the way to his tent.

In front of the closed canvas flaps, a tray of cold slapjacks awaited him, most likely left by his aide at dawn's light. A quick glance inside the tent assured him his personals were still on his bed, undiscovered. Crouching down, Andy wrapped the thin pancakes in the cloth napkins on his tray, then tucked them carefully into his haversack, along with the small tin of coffee that comprised his breakfast. After refilling his canteen with water from the regiment supply barrel, he headed for Mendenhall's tent.

This time, the tent's flaps were closed against visitors, but Andy rapped on the canvas, a hollow sound in the early light. "Doc?" he called out.

No answer.

Taking the medical supplies from his haversack—the needle and what remained of the thread, the bullet probe, the thin vial of ether—he shoved them beneath the tent. He kept the morphine and the gauze, but the rest of it he didn't need

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

any longer, and Mendenhall was short on supplies, that much was true. He thought of the ugly swelling around Sam's wound and wondered if the surgeon kept any bleeders or quinine in that apothecary chest of his.

The thought of ducking inside to check was tempting, but to be honest, Andy didn't know what to look for, and he didn't want to ask for more medication when the army was so low on supplies as it was. He'd save his money for food—that was all Sam needed, a few hot meals, some tender care, someone to watch over him and clean the wound and tell him he was loved, and he'd get better. Andy knew he would.

So he left Mendenhall's tent undisturbed and headed across camp to the sutler's, who sold additional rations and supplies to the soldiers. There Andy splurged. The sutler, an unkempt man twice his own age, watched as Andy picked over his goods, selecting dried meats and desiccated vegetables, bread and cookies and sugar, anything portable he could find. When he finally turned to the sutler, hands full, the man's eyes shone with greed. "That comes out of your pay direct," he said, as if Andy weren't aware of the way he plied his trade.

"I know." Andy had never used the sutler's goods before, preferring to hold onto his money, but he'd heard the soldiers talk. Though they loathed the sutler himself for his crooked ways and inflated prices, they praised his supplies. Everything was outrageously priced, but Sam was worth it. Hell, he was more than worth it, and half a month's pay was little compared to his getting better. "I can pay you now, if you want."



## *A HEART DIVIDED*

But the sutler shook his head, the motion barely disturbing the shock of white hair that floated like a nimbus around his face. "It's just as easy the other way."

Andy began to tuck the items into his haversack, which was soon overflowing. The sutler held out another. "Just a dollar more, if you want it. Ain't bad for a big spender like yourself."

"I'm fine," Andy told him. He'd make it fit.

When it didn't, Andy gathered the remaining supplies in his arms. The sutler gave him a harsh frown, as if upset he hadn't taken the second bag. "You sure you got that? The sack's cheap."

"I'll manage." Andy turned to go, but something hanging from the frame of the sutler's tent caught his eye. Two long tapers of wax, held together with one braided, uncut wick, dangled before him like temptation. Nodding at them, Andy asked, "How many candles you got?"

"How many you need?" the sutler countered.

Andy took two pairs, which the sutler hung from his outstretched hand. Back at his own tent, he dropped the supplies on his bed and folded his blanket into a sack around them. He glanced at the rifle propped against the post of the tent—should he take it with him? How much ammunition did Sam's gun hold? Was it even worth the hassle to carry along his own?

No, Andy decided. It was an awkward gun, unwieldy in battle and damn heavy to carry. Andy didn't relish the thought of hauling it back to the cabin. After a moment's debate, he

## A HEART DIVIDED

settled for slipping his revolver barrel-first into the makeshift sack. Then he slung the blanket over one shoulder. As he headed for the tent's opening, he remembered the letter he'd started to his sister and tucked beneath the cot. Retrieving it, he folded it carefully into his over-stuffed haversack and left his tent. He didn't know when he'd be back.

He went looking for his aide, but a short walk around camp proved the place was empty. Everyone must have been out in the battlefield on their scavenge and burial detail. For a moment he thought about leaving the boy a note but decided against it. He didn't know who else would read it. He wanted to explain his absence, in as broad terms as he could, but he knew he couldn't stay with Sam all evening. He'd have to return when the men got back from the field, if only for appearances. He didn't want anyone to think he was deserting the army, not now, not when he needed the supplies and the money and he only had a few months left before he could be honorably discharged.

Back in the woods, the fog had lifted somewhat and Andy kept low to the ground, afraid of running into anyone from his regiment. *What's in your haversack?* they'd want to know. Half the damn camp, by the looks of it. He could almost hear his compatriots' questions now. *What's in the blanket on your back? Why a lantern in the daylight? Where are you going?*

He didn't need such trivialities bogging him down. So he made his way around the battlefield, keeping back among the trees, and each shout that echoed around him brought him to his knees. He'd hunch over, waiting, holding his breath as if

## A HEART DIVIDED

afraid someone might hear it in the silence of the woods. Only when the voices drifted away would he start up again, slower this time, more careful than before.

By the time he reached the cabin, the sun had begun to reflect off the fog, and bright sparkles like stars winked through the trees. Andy caught the refraction from the corner of his eye and whirled, reaching for his revolver, but it was only sunlight dancing across the fog. Andy shook his head to clear it as his heartbeat slowed to normal. *Nothing but the sun. No men following me, not Wiley or Mendenhall or, hell, even a Yank wandered off from Sam's company and trailing after me. You're on edge, Lieutenant. You're this close to losing it.*

He knew. When had he slept last? His eyes itched with a grainy burn he couldn't rub away, his stomach rumbled hungrily, and he just wanted to lie down on the floor of the cabin beside Sam, pull the boy into his embrace, and fall asleep with him in his arms.

At the cabin, he found Sam where he had left him, dozing fitfully. Already the morning was warming up, and in a few more hours, the heat of the day would become almost unbearable. Andy could already feel the humidity in the air. But he gathered a few dry sticks and built a small fire in the empty pit dug into the floor of the cabin, then set the tin of coffee into the sputtering flames. When the drink was hot, he warmed up the slapjacks and sat down beside Sam. Rolling up one of the flat pancakes into a crepe, he pressed it to his lover's lips. "Breakfast is served."

Sam opened his eyes and stretched. "You're back," he

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

said, surprised. "And I'm starving."

His mouth opened in a yawn that ended with his biting into the pancake Andy held for him. He chewed slowly, watching Andy. Despite his own hunger, Andy wanted Sam to eat his fill first. He needed the nourishment.

Swallowing the first bite, Sam whispered, "I'm sorry."

"For what?" Andy pressed the pancake to Sam's lips again, and when he opened his mouth to speak, Andy slipped the rest of the pancake inside.

Sam grinned around Andy's fingers. His eyes closed as he sucked gently, and Andy smoothed his thumb along the scruff on Sam's chin. He remembered the last time they had been together and the delicious feel of Sam in him, above him, his thumb between Andy's lips to keep him from crying out in lust and desire as they made love. Sam had had teeth marks on the pad of his thumb that hadn't disappeared for days. When Andy's father had asked about them, Sam mumbled something about catching his hand between a cribbing horse and the stile.

Gently, Andy eased his fingers from Sam's mouth and curved a wet trail down the thin growth of hair on his jaw. "No need to be sorry, love."

"I was mean," Sam whispered. "Hateful. I let the pain get to me, and I'm sorry for lashing out at you about it. You're only trying to help me—"

Andy stroked his cheek. "I know."

"I'm sorry I got shot," Sam continued, leaning into Andy's palm. "And I'm sorry for being a burden to you."

"You're not," Andy assured him. "None of that's your

## A HEART DIVIDED

fault and you know it. You can't be sorry for what you can't control."

Sam frowned as he picked at the buttons on his shirt and didn't reply.

In a softer voice, Andy added, "You're not a burden to me, Sam. God, you don't know how many nights I've lain awake wanting you. My pickets thought you were a ghost last night, and for the past three years you *have* been a ghost, to me. Haunting my dreams, invading my sleep. I've never stopped thinking about you, *ever*. I used to close my eyes and feel you touching me, your hands, your lips...like phantoms on my skin."

Sam sighed. "If I die—"

"You won't." Andy rolled another slapjack between his fingers and pressed it to Sam's lips, but his lover turned away.

"If I do," Sam persisted.

"You *won't*." Andy didn't want to think about it because it wasn't going to happen. "You're healing now, Sam. You won't die."

Sam sighed again. "Just listen to me, okay?"

"No." Andy shook his head, stubborn. "I'm not going to listen to you talk of death when it isn't going to happen."

Sam's mouth pulled into a familiar petulant pout. "Hear me out."

Andy touched those puckered lips with his finger and grinned. "Your smile was the only thing keeping me going most days, but you know how badly that pout of yours gets to me, so stop it right now." He put the pancake to Sam's lips

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

again and pressed it. “Stop pouting.”

For a moment Sam didn’t reply. Then his lips pulled into a sunny grin and words tumbled from his mouth as he hurried to set them free. “If I die, I want you to know—”

Andy shoved the pancake into his mouth, cutting off the words. “You won’t die, I won’t let you,” he said, his voice firm.

That settled matters as far as *he* was concerned.

## CHAPTER 12

When the slapjacks were gone, Andy held Sam's head up off the floor so he could drink some of the tepid coffee. After a few sips, though, he turned his face away from the offered cup. "Enough," he sighed.

"Sam," Andy admonished, "you need to eat."

"I ate," Sam replied. "I'm full. Don't want anymore."

Andy curved a hand along his cheek and frowned at the heat that burned through his lover's skin. For a moment he considered forcing him to finish the coffee—he needed his strength if he were to get better. But when Sam's eyes slipped shut, Andy didn't have the heart to keep him awake any longer. He knew his lover was exhausted, and needed his sleep

## A HEART DIVIDED

as much as he needed to eat.

The fire had burned down low while they ate, and now it guttered with each scant breeze, at times almost winking out completely. Finishing the coffee himself, Andy checked Sam's wound again. It was still a horrible purple color, and the stitches looked painful against the angry red flesh, but at least it wasn't bleeding any longer. This time he didn't rewrap it—*let the air get to it*, he thought. Maybe that would help along the healing process.

"How's it look?" Sam wanted to know.

Andy frowned. "I'm not sure."

Sam tried to push himself up to look at it. "Let me see."

Placing his hands on Sam's shoulders, Andy held him down. "It's not too pretty, trust me. It'll only hurt worse to look at it."

"I want to see it," Sam said, but when Andy leaned down over him, he didn't struggle. Staring up into Andy's eyes, he blinked slowly and sighed. "It hurts now."

"I know it does." Andy kissed his cheek, the skin hot beneath his lips. Brushing a hand through Sam's reddish-blond hair, he kissed his lover's forehead, letting his lips linger on the fevered flesh. As he pressed his fingers to Sam's cheek, he murmured, "You're burning up."

"I'm just hot," Sam answered.

Andy didn't think it was as simple as that. Silently, he prayed, *God, please...don't let it be an infection. Anything but that.*

Sam's lips parted as Andy stroked his cheek, and when his



## A HEART DIVIDED

eyes fluttered, Andy kissed him tenderly, tasting sour coffee and the sharp tang of unsweetened pancakes on Sam's tongue. "Tired," Sam whispered, snuggling against him. His hands fisted in the front of Andy's shirt, pulling him closer. "Aren't you tired?"

"A little," Andy admitted. In all honesty, his very bones ached—he wasn't just tired, he was drained, utterly and completely. The only thing he really wanted was to lie down beside Sam, close his eyes, and sleep the rest of the war away. But there was Sam to think about, to watch over. Kissing his lover's closed eyelid, Andy whispered, "You sleep. You need it."

"What if someone comes?" Sam's voice sounded boyish and sleepy, as if he struggled to stay awake.

"I'll keep watch," Andy promised. "You just get better, okay? Let me handle everything else."

With a slight nod, Sam buried his face in Andy's shoulder and fell asleep.

Andy lost track of time, stretched out on the hard floor of the abandoned cabin, his body curled against Sam's while his lover slept. He smoothed a thumb down Sam's cheek as he watched Sam's face in the strengthening light. *I love you. I'm not letting you go. You're not leaving without me again, do you hear me?*

As if he *had* heard that thought, a faint frown creased Sam's brow and he sighed, lips pressing against Andy's neck, breath ticklish and hot along Andy's skin.

Sometime before noon, Andy woke with a start. His face

## A HEART DIVIDED

was slick with sweat and he felt groggy and disoriented, as if everything inside him had rattled loose and any sudden movement would jar it all together in a cacophony of pain. Everything hurt. *I slept?* he wondered, blinking awake. *God, I feel like shit. My arms, my legs, my whole damn body—I feel worse than before.*

Rolling over, he saw Sam still lying in his arms, but his face was mottled, his lips tinged an unhealthy blue, and when Andy sat up, his lover shivered beneath him. “Cold,” he breathed, though pressing a hand to his temple was like touching the side of a cast-iron pan resting over a campfire. “Andy—”

“Right here,” Andy replied.

Quickly he shook the dry goods out of the sack he’d made from his blanket. He hadn’t meant to fall asleep. How *stupid* of him! He should have never lain down. *Must’ve been more tired than I thought. Did anyone find us? Did anyone come?*

He didn’t have time to worry about that. Sam shivered beside him, and Andy shook the blanket free from the last of the supplies. When it was empty, Andy draped it over Sam, mindful of his wounded leg, and tucked the edges beneath his lover’s chin.

“God, Sam,” he sighed, dampening a strip of gauze from the canteen. He patted his lover’s ghostly pale face with the wet gauze in an attempt to cool it down. As much as he didn’t want to admit it, he suspected an infection had set into Sam’s wound. He’d known too many men who had died after their wounds healed, died from disease and gangrene and God only

## A HEART DIVIDED

knew what else. *But I cleaned the wound*, Andy told himself. In his hand, the gauze warmed where it touched Sam's skin. *The needle was clean and I've kept the leg wrapped, so how can he be infected with anything? That whiskey alone should've killed off anything bad in the wound.*

Sam kissed Andy's palm. "The medicine," he pleaded. "Please."

He grasped Andy's wrist in both hands, his touch like a hot stove. Andy almost expected his skin to discolor beneath Sam's fingers as if burned by the sun.

He didn't hesitate. Andy fumbled with the cap on the morphine bottle, the syrup spilling across his fingers in his haste. When he placed the cap against Sam's lips, his lover drank the offered medicine greedily, his hot tongue lapping up the spilled drug from Andy's fingers like a cat drinking milk.

"More," he whispered, and for a moment Andy considered it. "Jesus, Andy, I need more, please."

But the anguish in that plea made Andy shake his head. "No," he said, putting the morphine away. "You need a doctor, Sam. You're—"

"I'm going to die." Sam clutched at Andy's hand and kissed the fingertips, still stained with the drug. Andy thought the gesture was more from desperation than affection. "Just make it easier for me, that's all I want. If you love me, you'll do that, right? Won't you?"

"You're not going to die," Andy told him. "There's a surgeon back at my camp—"

"He's not going to help me." Sam sighed, a pitiful sound

## A HEART DIVIDED

that wrenched Andy's heart in his chest and brought tears to his eyes. As he stood, Sam grasped at his pants. "Where are you going? Don't leave me, Andy. Don't leave me here all alone to die."

"You're not going to die," Andy said again, but even from this distance, he could feel the fever coming from his lover in waves, and his voice held none of its earlier conviction.

*What the hell happened here?* he thought as he emptied the rest of the food from his haversack. He'd fallen asleep somehow, let down his guard, and beyond the cabin, the day had run its course. The sun now hung low in the western sky, casting the trees in a red, pre-evening glow. And Sam...somehow while they slept, Sam's condition had worsened. His fever raged unchecked, and Andy could only imagine the pain that tore through him. The very thought of his lover under so much physical turmoil made his hands shake with helpless anger. What could he do now that hadn't already been done? What else could he possibly do to help Sam?

*He needs someone more experienced than me. He needs Mendenhall.*

Yes. The surgeon would come if he asked, Andy was almost sure of it. Hadn't he returned his supplies? And he had paid for them, too. Ten dollars, easy money for a loan and his silence. *And he already suspects Sam's a Federal*, Andy reminded himself. So there'd be no shock when the surgeon discovered he'd been right.

He'd get Mendenhall, Andy decided. With his mind made

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

up, he shoved the morphine deep into the haversack, not liking the way Sam's eyes glistened as he watched. The surgeon would come if Andy asked...and would follow Andy's money, if he needed additional prompting. He would have leeches, and quinine, and who knew what else that could make Sam better again. Shouldering the haversack, Andy stood up. "I'm coming back."

"Where are you going?" Sam asked, suspicious. "Don't just leave me here."

"I'm coming back," Andy said again. He looked down at Sam, shivering beneath the blanket despite the heat of the day, and sighed. "You've got an infection or something, I don't know what, but it's making you worse so I'm going to get the sawbones and bring him back here to look at you."

"He'll have me arrested." Sam's eyes filled with tears as he shook his head. "I don't want to die in a prison, Andy. I don't want to lose you like that."

"You won't lose me." Andy bent and kissed Sam's forehead, wincing at the fever beneath his lips. "You aren't going to die and you won't be arrested, I swear it. I'll be right back. I've been gone too long as it is."

Had anyone at the camp noticed his absence? He hoped not. For a long moment, he frowned at Sam as his lover studied him, his gaze flickering across Andy's face and chest and hands to settle at the haversack resting by his side.

An unspoken question lit his eyes, and Andy shook his head. "No more," he said, touching the haversack in a protective gesture.

## A HEART DIVIDED

There was Sam's pout again, and the pain in his eyes made it almost unbearable to see.

It took all the strength Andy had to turn away. "I've got to go back for a little while, Sam, you know that. If I don't show my face, they'll think I deserted and they'll come looking for me. Then I'll get shot and they'll take you prisoner. That's not going to happen, do you hear me? I won't *let* it happen."

Sam sighed. "You won't leave me?" Andy shook his head. Another sigh, then the real question came out. "You won't leave me the medicine?"

"No," Andy replied, clenching the haversack's strap in his fist. "I can't. You'll understand—"

"Oh, I *do*," Sam spat.

Andy took a deep breath and reminded himself it was the pain talking, not his lover, not Sam, not the man he would die for, the man he loved beyond all else.

"I understand," Sam muttered darkly. "Leave me, fine. Without the drug, *fine*. I'll just die here—"

Andy whirled around, his own anger rising in him, tinged with a helplessness he didn't care for one bit. "You *won't* die, Sam, so stop saying that already, will you? I know it hurts. I know it's bad. Do you think it's easy for me to leave you like this? Do you think I *want* to go back when you need someone by your side?"

He waited for Sam to answer, but his lover pouted harder and turned his face toward the wall, away from Andy. Dismissing him.

"I'm coming back," Andy said again. "I'll have the

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

surgeon with me and you'll get better, do you hear me? You're going to get better."

Sam laughed, a mirthless sound. "Yeah, right."

"If it kills the *both* of us," Andy swore, "you're getting better."

At first, Sam said nothing. Andy waited, but his lover didn't turn his harsh gaze from the wall. As the seconds dragged out between them, Andy began to think Sam wouldn't bother to reply.

*Fine.* He himself had nothing more to say either. Settling the haversack into a more comfortable position over his shoulder, he turned to leave.

Behind him, Sam whispered, "Tell me you love me."

Andy stopped in mid-step. "You know I do," he said, his voice soft, his anger spent. "I love you more than life itself."

Sam sighed. "Then go. And hurry back. I love you, too."

## CHAPTER 13

*“I love you, too.”*

The words echoed in Andy’s mind as he raced through the forest back to camp. Sunlight slanted low through the trees, turning the cloudy sky above the branches into a fiery sea. Sunset, meaning the woods would become draped in darkness soon. Had he slept that long? No doubt he needed the rest, but now he felt as if he were running out of time, what with the approaching night and Sam’s growing fever...

He had to find Mendenhall, had to bring the surgeon back to the cabin. He wouldn’t want to come, but Andy had to convince him somehow, he had to make him *see*... As he ran, he clutched the haversack close to him, hand fisted around the



## A HEART DIVIDED

bottom of the sack and the bottles that jostled together with what money he had left. Mendenhall *had* to help; he was Sam's only hope.

Andy crashed through the trees, heedless of the noise he made as he ran. He *wanted* his men to hear him now, wanted them to know he was still there. He hoped no one had noticed him missing, but that was a laugh—he was one of three lieutenants in his company. Even if none of the privates noticed, Wiley would, or McNair. Andy hoped they didn't think he had deserted the army or was leaving his post. Andy had seen good men shot for trying to run out of the battle. He wasn't one of them.

Sam's words echoed through him as he ran. "*I love you, too.*"

*God, Sam.* Everything else his lover had said was just the pain talking, Andy knew. Those four words erased it all—the past three years, the bitterness he'd heard in Sam's accusatory voice, the hurt his father had caused him when he sent Sam away. Like the tide washing away words writ in sand... "*I love you, too.*"

Sam wouldn't die, Andy vowed. He wouldn't *let* him.

With a cacophony of sound, Andy crashed through the woods and stumbled to a stop at the perimeter of his encampment. What he saw brought him up short—or rather, what he *didn't* see.

There were no pickets on duty on the outskirts of camp. Andy stopped, disoriented. Two men were to be posted at all times, that was the rule. Where were they?

## A HEART DIVIDED

Slowly he stepped into the camp. The fires were gone, dust kicked over the pits to tamp down the ashes. The tents had been thinned out, most missing or in various stages of disassembly, and the ones still standing had haversacks and bedrolls packed outside.

“No,” he whispered.

Around him soldiers worked to break up the camp. A private hurried by, arms full of supplies, and Andy caught the man’s elbow as he passed. “Hey,” Andy said, stopping the soldier. “What’s going on here?”

A look of frustrated anger crossed the soldier’s face, but when he saw Andy, he struggled to salute despite the full load he carried. “Lieutenant,” he said, nodding. “Didn’t recognize you without your coat. Are you all right, sir?”

Andy waved away the soldier’s concern and swept an arm around at the camp. “Who ordered this?”

“Haven’t you heard?” The private was a young boy, younger than Sam, with dark eyes and a wide mouth that pulled itself into an easy grin. Andy tried to remember his name but couldn’t. When he shook his head, the soldier laughed. “We’re going to Petersburg, sir. General Lee’s sent for reinforcements.”

“He what?” Andy asked, incredulous. *Not now*, he prayed. *I can’t leave Sam. God, please, not right now.*

But the private kept nodding as if to say, *yes, now, right away, we’re leaving this instant, Lieutenant.* “A rider came last night,” he told Andy. “Late, looking for McNair. We’re to leave at once.”

## A HEART DIVIDED

*At once...*

"No," Andy said, shaking his head. Petersburg? It was a good day's ride south, past the capital, and he couldn't leave Sam to fend for himself, not in his current state. His mind was numb, his thoughts a swirl that left him confused and disoriented. When the soldier shrugged out of his grip, Andy barely noticed. "At once?"

"Sir, yes sir." The private frowned at Andy, concern still clouding his brow. "Are you sure you're all right?"

"Fine," Andy lied, distracted. He wasn't fine, he was *anything* but fine, and he needed to find Mendenhall.

Perhaps there was still time.

Not much, but enough to get Sam healing, and *then* maybe he could ship out with the rest of his regiment, if he knew Sam would be left in capable hands. *Maybe Mendenhall can get him to Chimborazo after all*, Andy thought, pushing the soldier on. The hospital in Richmond would be the best place for him, Andy knew that, and it was along their way...

With that idea in mind, he hurried across the camp. He would catch the surgeon before he left and Sam would be okay, there was still time, there *had* to be.

But Mendenhall's tent was gone. Andy stood staring at the empty wooden pavilion that had been the regiment's hospital as of late, his mouth open in disbelief, his mind refusing to believe what his eyes saw. All that remained where the surgeon's tent once stood was raked dirt, a few footprints shuffled in the soft soil, and a thin strip of gauze, bloodied and tossed aside. The hospital was nothing more than a gaping

## A HEART DIVIDED

hole at the edge of camp, the interior hidden in shade as the sun set behind it.

*Gone. Just up and left. All his medicines, the apothecary chest, the supplies I returned to him, the needle and thread I had bought and given back...all packed up and gone, just like that.*

Someone came up behind him as he stood in the hospital's shadow, and Andy turned to find Wiley frowning at him, hands on his hips and a thunderous look clouding his face. "Where have you been?"

"Out," Andy replied, dazed. "Doc's gone?"

"All damn day?" Wiley wanted to know.

Andy pursed his lips in confusion. "What?"

Wiley crossed his arms, waiting.

Pointing behind him into the darkness beneath the hospital's wooden roof, Andy explained, "The sawbones. Mendenhall? Where is he?"

"Where the hell have *you* been?" Wiley asked again.

When Andy didn't respond, Wiley sighed and leaned against a nearby post. "You weren't in your tent this morning at reveille—hell, all day, far as I can tell, so I know this is news to you, but we've got orders to back up Lee at Petersburg."

"I heard," Andy said with a nod. "But Mendenhall—"

"McNair left before noon," Wiley continued as if uninterrupted. "Took some of the men with him, all the sick, the sutler and the surgeon, too. We're to follow behind him once the camp's been disbanded. At dawn—"

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

“Wiley,” Andy sighed. The name sounded like a plea. “I can’t.”

Wiley narrowed his eyes. “Are you cutting out on us?” he asked, his voice low. “You’ve been gone all day and now you’re telling me you’re leaving, just like that? Disobeying orders, abandoning post—I never pegged you as a deserter but if you’re bailing out, I’ll shoot you now, I swear it.”

“It’s not what you think.” Andy shook his head as he glanced around the camp. How could he possibly tell Wiley about Sam? What could he say to make his comrade understand the way he felt for another man? The way Sam tasted on his lips, the way it felt to hold him in his arms, those eyes and that hair and that smile, those hands at once rough and soft and gentle and strong? How could he put into words that feeling? Or that he could see forever in Sam’s eyes—how could he ever make someone like Wiley understand?

He couldn’t. Lowering his gaze, he scuffed his foot through the dirt. In a soft voice, he muttered, “It’s not that at all. Trust me.”

“What is it then?” Wiley asked. Andy shrugged but didn’t reply. “I’m waiting.”

“We leave at dawn?” Andy asked instead of answering the question.

For a moment he thought Wiley would stay stubbornly silent until he told him where he had been, what he was up to, and why his tent had been empty since the night before. Andy couldn’t deny he’d been gone all day, and if pressed, he didn’t think he could explain how it wasn’t desertion when it sure as

## A HEART DIVIDED

hell *looked* like desertion.

But to his surprise, Wiley sighed, a defeated sound in the gloaming dusk between them that told Andy he had won. A small victory perhaps, but a victory nonetheless. The sigh said Wiley wouldn't ask again where he had been, because he knew Andy wouldn't answer. And with that sigh, Andy knew Wiley wasn't going to shoot him or turn him in for neglecting his duty. They had known each other since the war began, and these days that amounted to a wary form of friendship, if nothing else.

"I was going to send you on then." Wiley frowned at the soldiers working to pack their supplies as if he could hurry them up with the weight of his gaze. "Set you on the road with half the men left, then leave myself the next day, bring up the rear. McNair took the sick, and the scouts tell us there are Federals in the woods, so we need a detachment to ride back a bit, keep them occupied if they attack."

*If I leave the next day instead, that would give me tomorrow, too,* Andy mused, *and not just tonight.* Another day to think of what he could do for Sam. Were they close enough to a town that he could ride for a physician? He didn't know, but if he rode a horse hard enough, he could get to Petersburg by this time tomorrow if he had to, and there had to be a physician somewhere between here and there. Part of him had hoped he could sneak Sam into the camp, but the wounded had left already. Any opportunity he might have had to hide Sam among them was already gone.

*But if I leave last, maybe I can find him some help. Maybe.*

## A HEART DIVIDED

*God willing.* “Let me ride back,” Andy suggested. “I can take the rear guard, Wiley. I’m not even packed yet.”

Wiley sighed again. “Do you think that’s such a good idea? You won’t even tell me where you’ve been all day. Why should I trust you when the Yanks are on our tail?”

Meeting Wiley’s steady gaze, Andy asked, “Is that what this is all about? Do you think I’m turning coat on you?”

At Wiley’s shrug, Andy pressed his lips together until they were nothing but a bloodless line above his chin where his mouth should be. “How long have you known me, Wiley? Three years. Three goddamn years I’ve invested in this war and do you honestly think I’m going to sell my soul to Grant and his men?”

Wiley shrugged again, but he looked away from Andy’s piercing eyes.

Andy’s blood rose, pounding in his ears, his heart. “This damn war isn’t just about slavery, no matter what those guys in Washington want to say. You *know* that, Wiley. For me it was *never* about slavery. It’s fighting for what we believe in. For our way of life. It’s long nights out on the verandah, listening to the katydids and sipping iced tea and talking low about nothing much at all, just because you can. It’s the cotton in the fields and closing a business deal with a handshake, and that wink the grocer gives you when you stop in every week. It’s all that and more, stuff we can’t put into words so the Yankees will understand it, stuff that’s the way we live and *nothing* can change that, not the war, not General Grant, not Mr. Lincoln himself. It’s our way of *life*, Wiley, that’s what

## A HEART DIVIDED

we're fighting for, what *I'm* fighting for, and I'll not sell out or switch sides when I've given too much of myself to this damn war already."

He stood breathless for a minute, surprised by his own outburst, but Wiley just stared at him, silent. Unwilling or unable to speak.

Taking a risk, Andy whispered, "Have you ever been in love?"

Wiley's frown grew longer. "You mean like a girl back home?"

"I mean love," Andy replied. "I mean someone who sets your heart on fire and consumes your soul. I mean someone you'd not only die for, but someone you can't live without. That kind of love. Do you know it?"

"No." The frown on Wiley's face looked almost like a pout in the dying light, and Andy suspected he heard a twinge of envy in his compatriot's voice. "Is anyone worth that much?"

"Oh, yes," Andy told him, nodding. "God, yes. Everything I'm doing now, I'm doing for that love. I'm staying here because I know in a few more months I'll be able to head back home honorably. I'll have my pay and my discharge papers, and I can't come home a hero if I run out now, can I?"

"There are no heroes in this war," Wiley said with a bitter laugh. "Just a bunch of boys pretending to be soldiers. Nothing more."

Andy took a step closer and lowered his voice. "But I'll know it in *here*," he said, tapping his chest right above his heart. "I'll know I did my best, and I did it because my



## A HEART DIVIDED

country needed me, and not because we were right or we could win, or even because what we're fighting for is noble and good. I did it because I had to. And in my mind that makes us all heroes, Yank and Reb alike."

Wiley frowned at him, uncertainty flickering in his eyes. "You're a rare breed, Blanks, if you believe half of what you just said to me."

Andy sighed. "Let me ride back, Wiley. Please."

With a final sigh that sounded like defeat, Wiley turned away. "The day after tomorrow," he said. "Rear guard. I'm trusting you."

"I know," Andy replied. *You're not the only one—Sam trusts me, too. I hope I don't let either of you down.*

## CHAPTER 14

In his tent, Andy swept his personal effects from his bed and shoved them into his haversack without a second glance. He'd bought himself just one more day—not much of a reprieve, but it would have to do. He found his aide working with a crew of other boys, filling in the trenches that had served as latrines along one side of camp. “Pack up my tent,” he told the boy who nodded, grateful to be relieved from fatigue duty. But Andy shook his head. “Not until tomorrow morning, after Lieutenant Bucknell leaves. Start breaking it down then, you hear?”

The boy nodded again.

As Andy walked through the camp, he felt as if Wiley

## A HEART DIVIDED

watched his every move, and he wondered how he could slip past his compatriot's careful guard. He'd been away from Sam long enough, and his fists clenched at his sides in anxiety. Every muscle in his body wanted to race back to the cabin and check on his lover. But he didn't want to confirm Wiley's suspicions by bolting from the camp, and he sure as hell didn't want Wiley following him into the woods. Not to mention the problem of finding a physician...a problem he had to resolve in just one day's time.

*Or Wiley will shoot me, if I don't follow the regiment.* Andy knew that was no idle threat. If he wasn't on Wiley's rear guard day after next, the lieutenant would throw away the past three years they'd known each other and come after him, Colt cocked. No more questions, not this time.

At the edge of camp, the pickets were once again at their posts. Andy ducked through the bushes while the men talked, their laughter heady and quick. Their happiness to be leaving at dawn was evident—at least trekking to Petersburg would be something other than just sitting in the camp and waiting.

Under the cover of the pickets' laughter, Andy slipped back into the woods. He hid behind one of the trees and hunkered down, listening. Wiley watched him, he knew—at any moment, he expected the lieutenant to crash through the woods and follow now that Andy was out of sight.

As if on cue, Wiley's voice interrupted the pickets. "Where is he?"

Though he had been waiting for it, Andy still jumped. He was so damn *close*. Just a few well-placed branches separated

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

them from each other. The pickets' laughter cut off suddenly like a gas lamp and Andy knew they hadn't seen him.

Wiley's voice took on a hard edge. "Well? Where did he go?"

"Who, sir?" one of the pickets asked.

The other soldier sounded just as perplexed. "Ain't no one come through here, sir."

Andy could envision Wiley's frown in his mind's eye, and he covered his mouth with both hands to hide a relieved smile. "You haven't seen Lieutenant Blanks?"

"No, sir." Both pickets answered at once, and earnestly, as if the lieutenant was accusing them of not keeping their watch. Carefully one of the men asked, "You want us to tell you if we do?"

Wiley was staring into the woods, Andy knew it. If he moved now, he'd be seen, and Wiley would probably shoot him in the back if he ran. For once he thanked God that it was late March, despite the summer-like days and humidity—this early in the spring, fresh leaves unfurled on their branches, hiding Andy from view, yet there were few animals rattling around in the forest to draw Wiley's attention. The trees were silent save for the scant breeze through their limbs, and nothing crashed through the dense undergrowth, nothing at all. Andy even held his breath, afraid Wiley might be listening so hard and with all his might that he'd hear it when he could hear nothing else.

Finally Wiley sighed. "If you see him," he said, his voice retreating as he headed back into camp, "I'm the first to know.

## A HEART DIVIDED

You understand?"

"Yes, sir," one of the pickets replied.

Andy suspected the other nodded vigorously, so he waited until they began talking again. Their words were wary at first, but then the laughter resumed. Andy knew Wiley was gone and the pickets' attention elsewhere. Keeping low to the ground, he scurried deeper into the trees, looking over his shoulder at the men barely visible through the bushes.

When they disappeared from his view completely, he stood up and ran.

Every few steps he'd look back, sure they had heard him after all, sure they had called out to Wiley, sure the other lieutenant was trailing him, and he'd find Sam, he'd shoot them both. But the woods were empty around him, nothing but trees and bushes and the faint call of a bird as the sun sank lower in the sky. By the time Andy reached the cabin again, he had stopped glancing back. He knew there was no one there.

Inside the cabin he found Sam writhing on the floor, the blanket tossed away. "So cold," he whispered as Andy bent down beside him, and he hugged his chest with shivering arms. Despite the chills wracking through his body, a fine sheath of sweat stood out on his forehead, and the blue coat beneath his head was black and damp with perspiration. "So damn cold, Andy. Make it warm again. Make *me* warm."

Draping the blanket over him once more, Andy took Sam's coat and laid it out across his chest for added warmth. Then, as gently as he could, he eased Sam into a sitting position as he slid his legs beneath Sam's upper body. He wrapped his arms

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

around Sam, hugging him back to lie against his chest. He was cold, his hands icy, his lips almost blue, but he had deep red marks along his throat where he had clawed at the skin, and heat radiated from him like a small sun.

"It hurts," Sam sobbed, closing bloodshot eyes when Andy smoothed a hand across his cheek. His other hand fumbled with the bottle of morphine in his haversack. "My throat, my eyes, my head, my fucking *leg*... God, Andy, it burns. Everything burns."

"I know." Andy kissed Sam's forehead, the fever bringing tears to his eyes as he pressed his lips against his lover's skin. "I know, baby. It's going to be okay."

Why didn't he believe that any longer?

He held the bottle to Sam's lips and let him take a large swallow of the thick syrup. "The doctor?" Sam asked, wincing at the medicine's bitter taste. "On his way?"

"No." Andy closed his eyes so he wouldn't see the disappointment shining in Sam's own. "He's left, they're all leaving. We've got orders to head south to Petersburg. I go the day after tomorrow."

Sam sighed, a sad sound like wind through broken reeds. "This time you're the one leaving," he said, grasping at Andy as his lover cradled him in his arms. "I don't want to die alone."

"You're not going to die." Andy rocked back and forth, a gentle motion he hoped would soothe Sam a little, and finally the morphine began to take effect. Andy saw his lover's face droop like a wilted flower, his cheeks slacken, his eyes slip

## A HEART DIVIDED

closed once, twice, and then not open again. The trembling in his hands subsided as he held onto Andy tightly.

Around them the shadows began to lengthen with the coming night, slanting across the cabin floor as the sun set through the trees. Andy watched Sam's face smooth out as the medicine eased the pain. *An infection, of all things. He'd be fine if not for that. I could leave him here to heal, if not for that.*

A glance at the hole in Sam's pants showed angry red welts rising from the stitched wound, telltale lines working their way into his body, toward his heart. *What the hell am I supposed to do now?*

*"There are Federals in the woods."*

He heard Wiley's voice in his mind, as clear as if the lieutenant was in the cabin with them, and he jerked his head up, blood pounding in his ears, sure that he'd been followed...

But they were alone.

*"The scouts tell us there are Federals in the woods, so we need a detachment to ride back a bit, keep them occupied if they attack."*

*In the woods.*

The words echoed in Andy's head, looking to connect with something. He frowned down at Sam's Union jacket, trying to think. Federals in the woods meant a Union regiment nearby. Was it the men who had engaged Andy's soldiers in battle a few days earlier? Sam's regiment?

If so, where might the Union soldiers be camped? How far were they from the Confederates, how deep into the woods did

## A HEART DIVIDED

they hide? Absently, Andy combed his fingers through Sam's hair and, beneath his touch, his lover began to breathe a bit easier as he drifted off to sleep.

Where were the Federals? Close, if the scouts had learned of their presence. *Real* close, if Wiley thought they needed a rear guard. The sick had been sent ahead early so as to not slow the other soldiers down.

And Wiley hinted at him betraying the army. Not deserting, but selling out to the other side. *Which means the Union isn't just in the woods, but breathing down our necks. They're panting and Wiley can hear them out beyond the trees, and he's relieved to be leaving. It's been too long between attacks and they're out there, waiting. They probably watched the men bury the dead this morning, and he thinks they might even attack the camp if he's posted the pickets again. How far away are they?*

Andy thought about getting up, doing a little scout work himself, just a glance around the cabin to make sure there was no one out there before night fell, but he didn't want to disturb Sam, who had finally fallen asleep in his lap. Even with darkness drawing on, he was loathe to move to revive the fire, let alone rummage around in the bushes, chasing ghostly soldiers Wiley believed to be there.

For long moments, Andy stared into the dying embers of the fire, dazed. He had so many thoughts running through his mind at the moment that he couldn't seem to settle on one for any length of time, so he stared at the last of the flames and the hot coals, and thought of nothing much at all. The fingers



## A HEART DIVIDED

of one hand stroked Sam's flushed cheek, the other entwined in his mussed hair.

Suddenly Andy felt someone watching him.

He frowned down at Sam, but his lover's eyes were still closed. His hand was still wrapped around Andy's wrist as if to hold him in place.

*Wiley.*

Andy didn't want to look up into the empty darkness beyond the doorway—he didn't want to see whoever stood just off the porch, peeking in at them where the door used to be. It would be Wiley, he *knew* it, and the last thing Andy would see before the war was over for them both would be the barrel of a Colt staring him down.

Wiley had said he'd shoot him, didn't he? If he thought he was aiding the Federals...and Sam's coat lay spread out across his body, a Union coat, so Wiley wouldn't hesitate. Andy's chin crumpled and tears blurred his vision as he frowned down at Sam, caressing his lover's cheek with one hesitant hand. *Go on, kill me and get it over with. Kill us both, but the last thing I see will be him. Not you. Him.*

Minutes passed and he held his breath, waiting for a bullet that never came. Finally he risked a glance. It was getting dark out there beyond the porch, the trees already shadows closing in on them. At first Andy thought his mind was playing tricks—there was no one out there, nobody at all...

Then movement out of the corner of his eye caught his attention, and he heard the faint *snap!* of a twig beneath the heel of a boot. Andy whirled to stare beyond his fire, through

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

one of the walls that had crumbled down long ago.

*There* stood a soldier, a rifle in his hands but not aimed their way. His cap was tipped rakishly back on his head, and from this distance Andy couldn't tell if it were a beard or dirt lining the soldier's face. But there was no mistaking the uniform—ragged and dusty and worn, even in the dying light he could see the dark blue fabric.

*Federals*. He stared out into the growing night, his gaze meeting the soldier's unreadable eyes. *In the woods*. *Jesus*.

It wasn't Wiley at all. It was a Union soldier out there, watching them.

## CHAPTER 15

They stared at each other for one long, breathless moment—Andy with Sam asleep in his lap, the Union soldier out in the growing night. Red sunlight slanted around the stranger, casting the woods behind him into a stark tableau, and Andy waited for him to cock the rifle in his hands, to aim it into the cabin, to aim it at *him*.

Why hadn't he fired a shot yet?

*He sees Sam's coat, Andy thought, watching the soldier watch them. It's blue like his own, so he knows Sam's one of his men. But then he must see my haversack as well, and it doesn't take a genius to see the Confederate markings along the front of it—my rank, my regiment, the damn flag—so he*

## A HEART DIVIDED

*must know I'm a rebel.*

The eyes that watched him confirmed Andy's suspicions. *He knows it, and he's not quite sure what I'm doing here with one of his Yanks but he's going to hold fire until he finds out.* If he'd been watching them for any length of time, then the soldier probably noticed that Sam was bad off. Or maybe he thought them resting, friends by necessity, abandoned by their regiments and left for dead. Or maybe...

*Just ask him yourself. He hasn't shot you yet so maybe he won't.*

Running a hand through Sam's hair to push it back off his sweaty face, Andy cleared his throat and called out, "Hey."

The soldier jumped as if spooked. A look of unbridled fear crossed his face. Andy saw his hands grip the rifle tighter, and for a moment the barrel dipped toward them.

Quickly Andy held up both hands to show he was unarmed. In his lap Sam muttered, his head tossing to one side before he settled back to sleep again. "Wait," Andy said. "It's okay. I'm not—"

The soldier bolted.

For a minute Andy wondered if he had ever been there at all—he was gone that quick, like a ghost by dawn's light. Then he heard leaves rustling, branches cracking sharply, the crash of flight through the woods, and he knew the soldier was running away. Without further thought, Andy eased out from beneath Sam and stood. He rested his lover's head on his haversack and picked up Sam's rifle, discarded to one side. He snagged his revolver, too, tucking it into his belt, just in case.

## A HEART DIVIDED

Then Andy raced from the cabin, tripping down the steps of the porch and stumbling through the undergrowth to catch up with the soldier.

Despite the darkening dusk draped across the sky, Andy could see the soldier ahead of him through the trees. He hurried after, leaping over fallen logs and low bushes in an effort to reach him. *Stop*, he wanted to cry out, but he saved his breath and bent his head, pumping his elbows to force himself faster. The rifle slung over his shoulder beat out a steady rhythm against his back and the Colt revolver jostled against his hip, in danger of falling to the ground, but Andy paid the weapons no mind. *Stop, please, stop already*. His lungs burned for air and he pressed harder, closing the distance between himself and the Union soldier.

The soldier looked back and saw Andy following. With a sudden burst of speed, he widened the gap between them, dodging trees and bushes and low branches in his haste to get away. His own rifle was still in his hands and he ran with it in front of his chest like a quarter staff.

Ahead, a thicket of bramble bushes stretched across their path and Andy slowed, expecting the soldier to do the same. Maybe the fellow could take Sam back to his own camp, Andy reasoned as he gasped to catch his breath. A Union soldier meant a Union camp nearby, where there would be a surgeon, someone to dress Sam's wound, someone to make him better.

Andy could hear the soldier breathing heavily as he closed in. Thank God those brambles were there; he'd be on the Federal in minutes, any second really...

## A HEART DIVIDED

The soldier threw another glance over his shoulder, his dark eyes wide, then burst through the thicket, unheeding the branches that clawed at his face and coat. Andy pulled up short in front of the tangled bushes, gulping air into his raw throat.

“Fuck,” he muttered, breathless.

He eyed the fat thorns covering the brambles, thick barbs he could almost feel scratch at his skin. Taking a deep breath, he held it and listened for movement through the thicket, sounds from the other soldier, ragged breathing or low cursing or breaking sticks, *something* to prove the man hadn’t simply disappeared into the night.

Nothing.

Around him the woods were silent, the only sounds the pounding of blood in his ears and the crinkle of dead leaves beneath his feet when he shifted his weight. Looking at the thicket again, he wondered if maybe it wasn’t as bad as it appeared to be, if maybe the thorns weren’t *that* painful. *If he could do it*, Andy mused, looking around at the darkened woods. *Shit, why can’t I?*

*Because he was running full tilt*, a voice in the back of his mind chastised. *He didn’t feel the damn thorns because he hit them going so fast. And you know you’re going to feel every single one, stepping in like this. Back up, start running, and try again. Or let him go.*

But Andy couldn’t do that, not if there was a chance the stranger might help Sam. Steeling himself with another deep breath, he shoved through the bushes and ignored the thorns

## A HEART DIVIDED

when they scraped at him. As they bit and tore at his flesh and clothing, Andy thought of Sam lying ill on the cabin floor, those angry red marks climbing up his leg, the tell-tale sign of infection setting in. He did this for Sam. These cuts and scrapes were nothing compared to the pain he'd feel if he lost the man he loved.

He burst through the thicket with his arms held up to protect his face from the briars. Once he cleared the bushes, he bent over and wiped his hands on his pants, palms bloodied and torn. "Jesus," he murmured.

Now he'd never find that soldier. After all the noise he'd made coming through the bush? The guy would be miles away by now, racing for a camp Andy didn't know how to find. He'd have to push back through the brambles to return to the cabin—he had to get back before Sam woke up and found him gone. And God, he'd left the haversack behind, hadn't he? With the morphine still inside. He shouldn't have left it—

The dry click of a rifle filled Andy's ears.

He looked up into the barrel of the Union soldier's gun. The stranger stared at him, eyes smooth and dark like chocolate in the dusk. This close Andy could see the scruff on his cheeks and chin was hair and not dirt, and when he frowned, his heart-shaped lips pulled into a bow. "Who are you?"

*No one*, Andy wanted to answer. He was hunched over his knees and didn't dare move, not with the rifle in his face. He could be honest—*Lieutenant Andy Blanks*, but he didn't think that would impress the stranger. *I'm just a guy*, he thought,

## A HEART DIVIDED

*just another soldier like yourself. No one important. No one at all.*

The choices flickered through his head and were gone, like fireflies at dusk. When he cleared his throat and forced a grin, the words that came out were, “How about you put that down and we talk about this, hmm?”

The rifle didn’t lower, but above its barrel the stranger’s eyes wavered. When he spoke, his voice held a thick New York accent. “Why were you chasing me?”

“Why were you running?” Andy watched doubt flicker across the stranger’s face, and he ventured to add, “I didn’t mean to scare you off.”

“You didn’t *scare* me.” The soldier frowned. With a nod at Andy’s rifle, he asked, “Where’d you get that Henry? It ain’t yours.”

Andy admitted, “No, it ain’t.” Slowly he straightened up, and the soldier backed away a step to get the rifle out of his face but didn’t lower the gun. “The guy I’m with—”

The soldier scowled. “You killed him? Took his gun?”

Andy shook his head. “No, wait—”

The soldier continued, growing indignant. “Stole his rations, too, I bet, and his ammo and his money—”

“He’s still alive,” Andy interrupted, anger flaring through him. This was stupid, this suspicion, when Sam didn’t have time to waste. “Look, he’s wounded and needs a doctor. He’s a Yankee—”

The soldier laughed. “Talley.”

Andy started. “You know him?”



## A HEART DIVIDED

With a shrug, the soldier frowned. "Maybe."

Hope soared through Andy's veins and, despite the rifle aimed at him, he took a step forward, daring to clutch the soldier's wrist. "Please, he needs help. I've stitched the wound but it's infected. He needs a doctor."

The soldier twisted out of Andy's grip. Bringing the rifle up between them, he snarled, "He went down in battle two days ago. He's dead."

"He's not," Andy said, shaking his head. "Not yet. He needs help. Please."

For a moment the soldier studied him, his disheveled hair, his dirty face, his torn and grimy clothes. *Gray* clothes, the color of a rebel, the clothes of an enemy. Then he sighed and in a low voice asked, "What's it to you?"

Andy wavered. Here it was again, the same discussion he'd had earlier with Wiley. What should he say? What *could* he say?

When he didn't answer, the soldier asked, "Who are you?"

"Lieutenant Andy Blanks," Andy replied. "My regiment is in these woods, you know that. After the battle a day or two ago, I heard him singing out in the night and..."

He trailed off, unwilling to say more. This soldier didn't need to know who Sam was to him. He'd never understand.

"Please," Andy said simply. "He needs help."

The soldier lowered the rifle and stepped closer. Andy held his breath when the man's hand caught his chin in a rough grip and turned his face up to the last of the light so the red rays from the dying sun shone into his eyes. The stranger's fingers

## A HEART DIVIDED

were strong on his jaw, and Andy tried not to flinch when he leaned closer still, his face blocking out the woods and filling the world. He stared at Andy's eyes, stared *through* them, then finally let Andy go.

Phantoms of his touch still pressed against Andy's skin, and Andy resisted the urge to rub the feeling away. "You're his boy," the stranger said softly. "He told me about you. Said you had eyes like mercury, quick and liquid and deep. And light. So damn light it hurt to look at them."

"He *told* you about me?" Andy had never had the courage to mention his lover to anyone besides his sister, not after the way his father reacted. He just assumed everyone would feel the same way, two men can't love each other, it wasn't right, it wasn't *proper*...

*But Sam mentioned me. He told this guy about me. He knows.*

Confused, Andy asked, "And you are...?"

"Herbert," the stranger said, sticking out a hand that Andy shook. "Delosier. The third. That's me."

Andy frowned. "And you're..." *Okay with this?* he wanted to ask.

Herbert interrupted him a second time. "A messmate, maybe a friend. Sam and I bunked together outside the Shenandoah and I caught a shot in my arm. I thought that was it, the war was over for me, so I made him promise to tell my girl back home if I died and he said he would. I asked if he had a girl and he said no, he had a boy who was waiting for him."

## A HEART DIVIDED

“He *told* you that?” Andy asked, incredulous.

Herbert laughed. “Yeah. I’d never heard someone out and say it before. I mean, I know it happens, but *still*...”

He looked away, uncomfortable, and Andy felt a goofy, dazed grin tug at his lips. His heart swelled at the thought of his lover telling this gruff soldier before him, point-blank, that he was in love with another man.

Herbert shrugged again. “He told me about you. I didn’t know you’d be a Rebel, though. I thought you’d be on a farm somewhere, maybe. Not...” He flailed one hand as he searched for what he wanted to say. “Not fighting the war, I guess. I don’t know. He’s still alive?”

Andy’s grin widened, and with relief, he latched onto the sudden change of subject. “Very much so, but he needs a doctor, and soon. Do you think you can take him back to your camp? You’ve got a sawbones there, right?” Before Herbert could answer, Andy said, “I have to get back to him.”

“Can I see him?” Herbert asked. “I mean, I believe you, but I’d still like to see him myself, just to make sure. I trust you, I do—you’re his boy and he loves you so you can’t be all that bad, but you’re dressed in gray, do you know what I mean?”

“I know.” Much as he hated it, Andy knew exactly what Herbert meant.

## CHAPTER 16

Herbert followed Andy, keeping a wary distance between them, but at least his rifle was aimed at the ground. Andy took that as a good sign—it meant the Union soldier trusted him, to some degree. It meant he would give Andy a chance, give *Sam* a chance, and that was all Andy wanted.

As they neared the cabin, they could hear Sam crying out from inside, his voice hoarse in the wilderness. “Andy! Oh God, Andy, make it *stop!*”

Without a glance at the soldier who followed him, Andy broke into a run. He heard Herbert right behind him.

“*Andy!*”

Inside the cabin, Sam thrashed from side to side. Andy

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

skidded across the rotting floorboards to fall on his knees beside him. “Shh, it’s okay,” he murmured, taking his lover into his arms. Sam clutched at him, the fever that rose from him coming off in heated waves that made Andy sick. “It’s okay, Sam, I’m right here. It’s okay.”

Sam buried his face against Andy’s chest and sobbed. “Don’t leave me,” he whispered, hot tears stinging Andy’s skin through his shirt. “I told you not to leave me alone.”

Smoothing Sam’s hair back from his sweaty face, Andy cooed, “I know. Hush now. You need to rest.”

When Sam stopped struggling, Andy glanced over at Herbert, who stood behind him and watched with wide eyes. The rifle hung forgotten from one hand. He stared as if he’d never seen one man hold another.

Exasperated, Andy snapped, “Can’t you light a fire?”

“Who’s there?” Sam rose his head and frowned as he looked over Andy’s shoulder. “Herbert? Is that you?”

“It’s me,” Herbert replied. “I hear you took a hit. I saw you fall.”

Sam laughed, a shaky, mirthless sound. “Like a brick,” he said, his voice as scratched and raw as the thorns in the briar thicket had been. “Set to die, too, until my Andy found me. Do you know him?”

Herbert laughed as he gathered dry sticks for the fire from the limbs scattered across the floor. “We’ve met. Almost shot him, too.”

“I’d have to hurt you then,” Sam replied, frowning.

Andy laughed at the earnest look in his red-rimmed eyes.

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

“I don’t think you’re in the position to hurt anyone right now.” When Sam tried to answer, Andy kissed his mouth to silence him. “I think you need to rest some, that’s all. You’re going to be fine now.”

Sam raised a hand to brush over Andy’s cheek. With a sigh, he trailed that hand down Andy’s neck, over the hollow of his throat, to rest it against his lover’s chest. “I was always going to be fine,” he murmured, slipping back into the semi-conscious sleep he seemed to drift through so easily. “You’re here. I’ll survive.”

“I hope,” Andy whispered, kissing Sam again.

It felt both liberating and strange at the same time to touch his lover in front of another. From the corner of his eye he could see Herbert watching them, silent, but when he saw Andy looking, the soldier turned away. Andy smoothed down the sweaty hair on Sam’s brow. “He’s asleep again.”

Busying himself with the fire, Herbert asked, “So what’s wrong with him?”

“Infection, I think.” Andy caressed Sam’s cheek and kissed his lover’s closed eyelids. Sam’s eyelashes fluttered like little copper shavings against his pale skin and he sighed once, his lips pressing to Andy’s neck with the warmth of a live coal. “He’s feverish. Throat hurts, tired, almost delirious. Fading in and out...can’t walk much either, but that’s just from the wound.”

Herbert nodded. Once the fire was lit, the flames pushed the shadows into the corners of the cabin, and he came over to sit beside Andy. Picking at the hole in Sam’s torn pants, he

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

frowned at the puffy skin around the stitches.

To Andy, the wound looked even worse than before, but it might have just been a trick of the light. He wondered if it would've been as bad had he listened to Mendenhall and brought the surgeon to Sam the night before, but it was too late for that. Too late to dwell on it, either.

"Looks like infection to me," Herbert declared, sitting back, "though I'm no doc or nothing. But my arm swelled up like that. Had leeches on me for a week, painful suckers, too. But Eli's good, I'll give the bastard that. He can break the fever, I'm sure of it."

"Eli?" Andy asked. "Is he your regiment's surgeon?"

Herbert laughed. "He's just a soldier like the rest of us. Like me and Sam, anyway. You've some rank on you—lieutenant, isn't it?"

Andy nodded but Herbert didn't see the gesture. He was staring at the place where Sam rested against Andy, his hand fisted in Andy's shirt, as if hypnotized by the sight. There was something unreadable in his eyes, something Andy couldn't quite grasp, and he wondered what the soldier was thinking, watching them like that. "Lieutenant Blanks," Andy said. "So this Eli isn't really a doctor?"

"He's just as good," Herbert declared. "Learned his trade on the battlefields. Ain't a real physician, mind you. Ain't got a degree. But he's good."

In Andy's arms, Sam shuddered and gasped, almost choking, before his breathing evened out again. "Do you think he'll be able to save him?"

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

“He’ll try,” Herbert said. “I can’t guarantee more than that, but I know he’ll try.”

Andy sighed. “I can’t carry him. He’s too heavy, even for the both of us, I think. And he can’t walk, I’ll not make him.”

Watching Herbert watch him, Andy chewed on his lower lip, indecisive. He thought of Wiley, and how the lieutenant was probably even now staking out Andy’s tent, waiting for him to return. He’d have to go back to the camp before Wiley left in the morning, if only to see him off. And then he had to leave himself the following day... “I have to leave him for a while tomorrow. I don’t want to, but my regiment—”

Herbert interrupted him. “I understand. Are your men stationed nearby?” Before Andy could reply, he shook his head. “Don’t tell me. I don’t want to know.”

“Do you think this Eli will come here?” Andy asked.

He was grateful Herbert didn’t ask for the location of his camp. He wouldn’t have revealed it anyway, but the unanswered question would’ve been awkward between them, eating into the fragile trust they shared only because they both knew Sam. He was all they had in common—beyond him, they were enemies, men on opposite sides of a war neither was winning.

Sam was the only thing real amid the dancing shadows cast by the fire, the only thing that mattered anymore. In Andy’s mind, Petersburg was a world away, as distant and incomprehensible as the stars beyond the moon. He couldn’t imagine another fight, another battle, because he only cared about Sam—the fever raging through his lover’s body was the



## A HEART DIVIDED

only enemy he wanted quelled.

Quietly, he asked, "Do you think Eli will leave your camp for one soldier?"

Herbert nodded. "He might."

"Can you fetch him?" Andy persisted. "Please?"

Indecision flickered across Herbert's face. "You won't follow me, will you?"

Andy shook his head.

Herbert persisted. "You'll stay here and wait for my return? You swear you won't follow?"

"I won't," Andy promised.

But Herbert pursed his lips, undecided, and asked, "You haven't any men watching us, do you? No one to follow me?"

"No one." Andy shook his head for emphasis. "My regiment doesn't know about him. No one does. Just me and now you, and—"

"Where did you get the supplies?" Herbert wanted to know. "The stitches, and the food? Do you have morphine? Where did you get that stuff?"

Andy sighed. "Mendenhall, the surgeon assigned to my regiment. The sutler sold me the food. They both left this morning." Frowning, he added, "We've got orders. I leave in another day myself. I don't want to..."

Herbert waved that aside. "Did he know, this Mendenhall? Did you tell him?"

Andy half-nodded, half-shrugged. "He didn't know *who* but he knew what I was up to. I paid him for the medical supplies. He'll not talk." At Herbert's wry grin, Andy

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

persisted, "I know he won't. He's a good man, a good doctor, but we're low on supplies and he took the money, so he can't say a word without sounding just as guilty as me."

"And no one's going to follow me," Herbert said, as if solidifying the idea in his mind.

Andy nodded again. "There's no one here but the two of us."

"Your men don't know," Herbert said.

In the firelight, his eyes were inky pools, and Andy thought of the unfinished letter to Mary in his haversack. He wondered if he'd ever get a chance to finish it now. "No," Andy assured him. "They don't."

Still Herbert persisted. "The ones left at the camp, they won't—"

Andy swore, "Jesus Christ. I know you're being careful, but don't you think I've taken precautions, too? Don't you think I've already done my best to keep my men away from him?" He nodded down at Sam in his arms, and as if in confirmation, his lover sighed his name. "No one will follow you. I promise."

Satisfied, Herbert pushed himself up from the floor. Shouldering his rifle, he frowned down at Sam and watched Andy's hand as it brushed across the thin shadow of peachy fuzz clinging to Sam's cheek. "I'll return shortly," he said. "I don't want to lead anyone into my camp, you understand. I won't walk into that ambush. But if you're sure there's no one else—"

"I understand," Andy said. "I'm sure. I know you've no

*A HEART DIVIDED*

reason to trust me, but please, believe me. For Sam's sake, if nothing else."

Herbert raised his eyes to meet Andy's steady gaze and nodded. "I shall return shortly."

Then he turned and hurried from the cabin, the echo of his boots on the hardwood floor fading into the darkness around them.

## CHAPTER 17

After the sounds of Herbert running through the forest dissolved into nothing more than the wind through the leaves, Andy began to cook a meager soup. Dried beef and vegetables, some flour to thicken the water...nothing much, but the smell of it warming over the fire made his stomach rumble.

Behind him, he heard Sam wake again. When Andy turned toward him, Sam held his arms up. "Help me."

Andy grinned and helped him into a sitting position, leaning him back against a wall of the cabin. "Feeling any better?"

Sam shrugged. "Eh." His eyes shone feverishly in the

## A HEART DIVIDED

firelight. With a nod at the pot cooking over the fire, he asked, "Is that for me?"

"Some of it," Andy conceded. "It's not my ma's sweet potato pie, mind you, but it'll do."

Sam laughed. In the growing shadows, his eyes were dark hollows like bruises, deep and pocked like peach pits in the firelight. His skin was sallow and taut across his face, and twin spots of pinked heat flared high on his cheekbones like the rouge Mary often wore back home. To Andy he was starting to look almost ghostly—if the pickets saw him now, they'd surely think him a phantom, a Union soldier gone to Glory back to haunt them for the dead they killed in the war.

*Soldiers will believe anything*, he told himself, turning back to the soup. *He's not dead yet. His friend has gone to get help and, God willing, he won't die.*

*Please*, he added silently, directing the prayer to heaven. *Don't let him die.*

In a low voice, Andy asked, "What's on your mind, love?"

"Your ma's pie," Sam said softly. Reaching out, he ran a hand down Andy's thigh. Andy caught it in his own and kissed the knuckles, which brought a smile to Sam's tired face. "The farm and your sister and the barn where we used to hide out from everyone. Remember?"

"I'll never forget."

Andy closed his eyes and could almost smell the fragrant hay all over again. In his mind's eye he saw Sam above him, his naked chest boyishly smooth, the muscles in his arms standing out like cords as he held himself up, eyes closed and

## A HEART DIVIDED

lips parted and breath coming in short bursts that matched his hard thrusts. Andy's hands on Sam's hips, pulling him in between his knees, holding him as they made love. Afterward they had lain together in the sweet hay, Sam kissing his neck and chest while Andy picked out the straws caught in his lover's hair...

His voice sounded as distant as that memory when he spoke again. "We used to sit in the loft for hours," he said, stirring the soup with one hand while he held Sam's with the other. "Wrapped around each other so damn tight, nothing could come between us. And we'd watch out through the window up there, watching the house and the fields, and you'd tell me how much you loved me. Your lips on my ear, you'd whisper it over and over again, *I love you, Andy. I love you so much.*"

"I still do," Sam whispered. He tugged at Andy's hand. "Come here."

Carefully Andy removed the soup from the fire and placed the scalding pot on the floor. Then he sank down beside his lover, taking him into his arms again, and stirred the soup with lazy strokes as he remembered the past. "It was so hot then," Andy said, "in the barn, in the summer, and your breath was hot, too, and I could feel it on me all night long. When you left, I felt it all throughout the winter as well, warming me."

Sam snuggled against him and sighed.

Andy ran a hand through Sam's sweaty hair. "I love you so much," he whispered. "I can still hear you say it to me."

"I'll say it forever," Sam told him, "because it's the truth."

## A HEART DIVIDED

He lay his head on Andy's shoulder, the fever in him burning through his lover's thin shirt. Between the heat Sam radiated and the fire before them, Andy barely felt the coming chill of the night. In another day, all this would be gone.

Burrowing closer to Andy, Sam murmured, "I don't know how much longer forever will be. I'm dying. You can't tell me I'm not."

Andy didn't want to think of that, and he had nothing to say to encourage Sam otherwise. It would just be wasted breath, words his lover would ignore, no matter what the outcome of his illness might be. With a heavy sigh, he pulled the pot of soup into the space between his knees because it was still too hot to hold, but he scooped out a spoonful of the thick liquid and pressed it to Sam's lips.

Sam opened his mouth and swallowed quickly, grimacing.

"That bad?" Andy asked with a laugh.

Sam smiled. "My throat hurts. It's not *too* bad." Another spoonful, another grimace, and he said, "If we get out of here, promise me you'll not cook again. We'll hire a housemaid if we have to."

"I told you it wasn't my ma's cooking," Andy said with a laugh.

Sam grinned at him, a shadow of his sunshine smile shining through the pain on his face, like a break in the clouds.

"*When* we get out of here," Andy corrected, "I'll take you dining every night. We'll not want for food."

"My meager savings won't be enough for *that*," Sam said.

Andy took a spoonful of the soup himself. Sam was

## A HEART DIVIDED

right—the soup wasn't *too* bad, but it didn't put the army's slop to shame, either.

As he watched Andy slurp at the spoon, Sam said softly, "Between the two of us, I doubt we'll be able to live it up much once the war's over. If we live that long. If *I*—"

"You will," Andy told him, cutting off his words. "Herbert has gone for someone named Eli, so you'll see another morning, Sam, trust me. I'm not letting you go that easily."

With a sigh, Sam whispered, "Herbert. So he *was* here. I didn't know if I dreamed him up or not."

"He's gone back to the Union camp. He'll be here soon."

*I hope*, Andy added silently. He hoped Herbert wouldn't reach his regiment and decide to leave them to fend for themselves, just forget about Sam and his fever and tell himself that he'd die anyway, he didn't need to bother Eli with it now. Or maybe he'd wait until morning, but by then Sam might not *need* a surgeon—by then, he might be too far gone and Andy would have to watch him die.

*I can't do that. I lost him once and it nearly broke my heart, and the only thing that kept me going was the fact that he was out there somewhere, he was out there and going to send for me. If he dies, I lose that. If he dies I won't be able to go on, I just know I won't.*

He kept his voice light. "He said he thinks this Eli can help you. Your sawbones?"

Sam sighed. "Yeah. Eli's patched up Herbert a half dozen times alone, so I'm sure he knows what he's talking about. Herbert's a bear when he gets to playing cards."



## *A HEART DIVIDED*

With a laugh, Andy said, "We have a few men like that, too. Heaven help you if they lose a hand."

"Herbert's a good man," Sam told him. "Good to have by your side when you're in a fight."

Carefully, Andy asked, "You told him about me?"

"Do you mind?" Sam turned his face up to Andy's and studied him for a moment before he kissed the exposed skin of his lover's neck. "You're my boy. He told me about his girl and so I told him about you. I didn't think—"

"It's okay," Andy said, a little too quickly. When Sam tried to sit up, Andy hugged him closer. "I guess it's different up north. I just think about my daddy and keep my mouth shut, that's all."

His father, a mild man with the disposition of a docile sheep when he wasn't haggling prices on his crop, had turned a livid shade when he found the two of them entwined in each other's arms. Andy would never forget the look of horror in his father's eyes when he watched his son stand, disheveled and sweaty. Sam had dared to slip his arms around Andy's waist and kiss his shoulder—the quick peck had made his father roar with rage. His pale face had purpled like a ripened eggplant, and his usually warm eyes had filled with disappointment and horror, everything Andy had never wanted to see directed his way. That look hurt more than all the beatings and lectures and punishments that followed. It hurt almost as much as watching Sam board the train and never knowing when he'd see his lover again.

And until Andy had found Sam with the wound in his

## A HEART DIVIDED

thigh, he hadn't thought anything would ever hurt as badly again.

*You're right, you know, he thought, kissing Sam's damp forehead. You're dying, fading fast, and if you don't get better soon, I have a feeling watching you leave on the train will be nothing compared to watching you die. It might be more than I can stand.*

Beside him, Sam frowned, probably thinking about Andy's father as well. He had been whipped like a mule and driven from the farm. It'd been Andy's father who spread the word his horser had been caught in a compromising position with another man—he hadn't mentioned his son by name, so Sam had borne the brunt of the town's scorn. Once word got around, no one would hire Sam. No one wanted to give him room and board either. In the end it had been Andy who'd purchased the train ticket, because the conductor wouldn't sell Sam a seat.

"Herbert was a little skeery at first," Sam admitted, "but he got over it. When he realized I'm not a dandy, and I've no interest in lying with him. One night he sort of flirted with me a bit, and I wasn't having it. I told him I had a boy. You. And he sort of indicated he might cotton to trying things out with me. Said no one needed to know."

"He didn't," Andy gasped.

Sam grinned. "So I punched him right here." He touched Andy's jaw just under his chin. "He was just lonely, I guess. We all were. But I set him straight and we've been friends since. He's the only one I ever told. I don't go crying it in the

## A HEART DIVIDED

streets, you know.”

Andy smiled at the thought. “I know.”

“I love you,” Sam said again, snuggling into Andy’s embrace. “I’ll tell anyone who asks, I’ll not lie about it.”

“Nor I,” Andy admitted. “But no one’s ever come right out and wanted to know.” Even his father had never asked. For all his yelling and cursing once he found out about the two of them, Daddy Blanks never considered *love* a reason Andy and Sam might have been together.

When Andy raised another spoon full of soup, Sam shook his head. With a slight frown, he asked, “Will you make love to me?”

Andy laughed and swallowed the soup himself. “Right now? You’re wounded. When you get better—”

“I might *not* get better,” Sam said, lacing his fingers through Andy’s. “I want you to be the last thing I see before I go, Andy. I want your kisses to be the last thing I taste, and I want to feel you one more time. I—”

He stiffened in Andy’s arms, all senses on alert. When he turned toward the doorway, Andy followed his lead, but saw nothing but shadows in the night.

Sam whispered, “Do you hear that?”

Andy cocked his head to one side and listened. Beyond the crackle of the fire, lapping at the wood, he could hear the wind through the leaves, a steady southing sound like the tide. But there *was* no wind—it was another muggy evening, warm and close, almost cloying with humidity.

That wasn’t the wind out there...it was someone walking

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

through the woods with a steady step, unafraid of discovery.

Andy's arm tightened around Sam as the sound of boot heels thudded on the porch. Heavy footfalls echoed around them, raining down like judgment, as someone entered the cabin. Two people—two shadows—coalesced just beyond the circle of firelight.

Then Herbert stepped forward, the firelight turning his tanned skin to gold, and his eyes twinkled merrily. "Told you he's alive," he said, nodding at Sam. "How are you holding up, kid?"

"Okay," Sam muttered, clinging to Andy like a small child suddenly confronted with strangers. "I'm dying."

Another man stepped into the light, shorter than Herbert but with the same shock of dark hair and a trim beard without a mustache. *Quaker*, Andy thought, and when the man spoke, his Pennsylvania accent confirmed it. "You'll not die on my watch."

He knelt before them, setting a heavy black kit bag on the floor. Relief filled Andy when the man opened the bag to reveal shiny metal medical tools.

With unreadable eyes, he glanced at Andy and smiled. "Eli Pusey." Then he turned his attention to Sam. "I'll not have come all this way tonight to let you die now. Show me the wound."

## CHAPTER 18

“Not bad,” Eli pronounced after examining the stitches. When he smoothed a hand across the sutures, Sam gasped in pain. The black thread stood out dark against purpled skin, bruised and swollen. “A little tight, but I did the same thing the first time I sewed a wound. You did this?”

When he looked at Andy expectantly, Andy nodded. “It’s infected, isn’t it?”

Eli shrugged. “Not like I thought it might be. The way Herbert burst into my tent, I thought it was General Grant himself dying in the woods. He tends to get carried away.”

“I do not,” Herbert replied, his voice gruff, but it didn’t hide the hint of a smile toying at the edges of his mouth. “I

## A HEART DIVIDED

just said there was a soldier out here who needed your help, that was it.”

“I’m glad you came,” Andy said, holding Sam’s hands in his own. “So you think it’s not that bad?”

*Do you think he’ll live?* he wanted to ask, but he wasn’t sure he wanted to hear the answer to that out loud.

Before he could ask, Sam spoke up. “It’s still infected, even if it’s not as bad as you believed it to be. It’s getting worse. I’m still going to die.”

Eli delved into his kit, extracting a needle and a small vial of medicine. “You may feel like you’re going to die, young man. And you may *wish* you were dead before the fever’s run its course. But you’ll not die, I promise you that. It could be worse, you know.”

“How so?” Sam grimaced as he watched the surgeon fill the needle from the vial. Without waiting to be asked, Andy rolled up the sleeve of Sam’s shirt to expose his bicep.

“I could have to amputate,” Eli replied.

With the quickness of one used to working under battlefield conditions, he pressed the needle into Sam’s upper arm, injecting him with the medication. Sam winced at the shot.

When he pulled the needle free, the surgeon handed Andy a pad of gauze, which he held over the tiny dot of blood marring Sam’s skin. “Quinine?” he asked, nodding at the bottle. It was the only medicine with which he was familiar, a bitter cure his men had used months ago when most of them had developed malarial fevers after the first few days in

## A HEART DIVIDED

Virginia.

Eli nodded.

With a frown, Sam asked, “Amputate? You’re joking, right?” When he got no response, Sam pressed, “Eli? You’re kidding me, aren’t you?”

Taking a short saw from his kit, Eli ran it lightly across Sam’s upper thigh. “I would have to cut right about here,” he said, watching Sam’s eyes widen in fear. Turning the saw a half inch, he traced an imaginary line that cut across Sam’s crotch. “Or here. Take out most of your ballocks with it. You don’t need those, do you?”

“Jesus,” Sam whispered. He scooted back against Andy, away from the saw, and glared at the crude instrument in the surgeon’s hands. “You won’t cut me with *that*. I’ll die first.”

“You won’t die,” Eli said.

Sam glanced behind him at his lover and whispered, “He wants to cut off my balls.”

“He’s just scaring you,” Andy whispered back. The relief that had filled him at the sight of the Federals was rapidly dissolving beneath Eli’s coarse bedside manner. Pushing the saw away, Andy hugged Sam close and muttered, “Watch where you put that blade.”

Eli frowned. “I meant nothing by it.”

Andy felt anger swell within him. “This isn’t funny. Too many men are going home from this damn war with less than God gave them, and you *joke* about it?”

Eli put away the saw. “I only wanted to show him he has it easy, compared to some. It could be worse.”

## A HEART DIVIDED

"I know that," Andy said, still angry. Sam trembled in his arms even as Eli latched up his kit again. "He's scared enough as it is, and I won't have you frighten him more."

With a slight laugh, Eli pointed out, "You're not in much position to tell me what you will and won't have me do. Why not take him back to your own camp if you question my methods? Why bother with me at all?"

Andy pursed his lips. "You know why."

"Then let me do my work," Eli replied, glaring at him, "and he'll live. Otherwise I can turn around now and leave—"

"No," Andy said, the word chipped in ice.

Meeting Eli's gaze, he waited. Tension curled through him, anger and hurt and weariness blending together, a myriad of emotions from the past day, everything he'd kept inside since he had walked out into the woods the night before and found Sam lying wounded on the battlefield. Now that Sam was going to get better, he wanted to let that tension go, it *ached* to be set free as it rattled inside him like a caged tiger, circling, watching, waiting for the moment to pounce. Just one wrong word, one wrong move, and he'd lash out with all that tension, all that unspent energy...and Andy didn't think he would be able to control it once it escaped.

But Eli turned away, unwilling to argue further. "You'll be fine," he murmured, patting Sam's leg. "Some more quinine later, a bleeding when we get back to the camp..."

Sam gasped. "No leeches."

Eli laughed. "They aren't that bad, so don't fret. Herbert?"

"They aren't that bad," Herbert said as if by rote. He



## *A HEART DIVIDED*

noded at Sam with the air of someone who'd been through the procedure before and lived to tell about it. "They just suck on you and leave these big welts, but once they're off, you feel better, trust me."

"They're not bad," Eli said, speaking to Andy.

"I've heard they work," Andy conceded. Hadn't he thought Sam needed to be bled earlier, when he went to get Mendenhall? Hugging his lover tight, he murmured, "You'll be fine, Sam."

Eli frowned at Sam. "Can you walk?"

"No." With a pout, Sam looked up at Andy. "I don't want to leave you."

"I have to go," Andy reminded him. His voice was soft and his hands gentle as he rubbed Sam's arm, his touch belying the anger within him. "I'm needed in Petersburg."

Sam sighed and rested his head against Andy's shoulder. "I know."

"How are you going to get him back to your camp?" Andy asked, his gaze shifting from Eli to Herbert, who stood behind the surgeon at the edge of the firelight.

Herbert pointed into the darkness outside the doorway. "We brought a stretcher. It's worn thin in a few spots, and one of the handles is near the breaking point, but it'll hold until we get back, I'm sure of it."

"If it held you," Sam muttered, "I'm sure it'll hold me."

"Hey!" Herbert cried, a hurt look on his face that made Sam snicker wildly. "I wasn't the one threatening to cut your balls off here. I went and got the doc for you, remember?"

## A HEART DIVIDED

The sound of Sam's laughter brought a smile to Andy's face. It was a carefree sound that reminded him of the boy he'd fallen for, the boy who grew up without him and became the man in his arms, who still loved him despite the years that had come between them.

*And now he's leaving again,* Andy thought, watching Eli wrap Sam's leg with fresh gauze. *I should get back to my own camp—Wiley's waiting for me to return, and I have to get ready to leave with the regiment. I haven't much time left in this bloody war.* It was the end of March, and just a few more months would make him a free man. He'd find Sam again then, and they'd go west in search of a place where they could live out the rest of their days together.

As Eli stood, Andy said, "I suspect you're leaving soon."

A look of fear flashed across Sam's face. "Not yet," he said, frowning at his compatriots. "Please—"

"There are others I need to see to," Eli told him. "I can't stay here all night." Turning to Herbert, he said, "Get the stretcher."

Sam shook his head. "No." With wide eyes, he looked up at Andy. "Please don't leave me. Andy..."

Andy smiled sadly and ran a hand through Sam's hair. "You're going to be fine now," he said. "A few more months, Sam, that's all. I get out of the service at the end of August and I'll find you, I promise."

"If you're not dead by then," Sam replied, bitter. "Don't go to Petersburg, Andy, please. I don't want you in the line of fire."

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

Andy glanced up at Eli, who shifted from foot to foot uncomfortably, waiting for Herbert to return. "I'll be fine," Andy promised. He kissed Sam's forehead, still hot with fever.

"Stay here," Sam persisted. "With me."

Andy laughed. "And desert my men? I can't do that. You know I can't."

Sam sighed. "I know." Then, lowering his voice, he said, "Make love to me. Right now."

Andy jerked his head toward Eli, who stared at the floor, a thick rose blush heating his cheeks. "We're not alone," Andy reminded him.

"I don't care." Sam grabbed fists full of Andy's shirt and pulled him closer, hiding his face against Andy's chest. "They can wait outside. It's been too long. So damn long, Andy. I need you."

But Herbert entered the cabin, dragging the stretcher behind him awkwardly, and any chance they might have had to be alone was gone.

"I love you," Andy whispered, kissing Sam's temple. "We've waited this long. We won't have to wait too much longer, I promise."

## CHAPTER 19

The stretcher was nothing more than a bed sheet tied taut between two long poles, and as Herbert laid it out on the ground, Andy could see where the material was beginning to fray around the knots tying it in place. Andy wrapped his arms around Sam's chest and lifted him up carefully while Eli and Herbert each took one of his legs.

Together the three of them managed to get Sam onto the stretcher without jostling him too much—Sam only cried out once, when Herbert let his leg slip from his grasp. “Sorry,” he muttered as Sam winced in pain. He shrugged at Andy, a hapless look in his dark eyes. “I didn’t mean it. I’m sorry.”

“Jesus,” Sam hissed, lying back. Before Andy could move

## A HEART DIVIDED

away, Sam reached up and eased his hands around his lover's neck. "Don't leave me."

"Sam, I have to." Andy hugged him awkwardly, but when Sam began to kiss his neck, he pulled away. "I have to."

Sam sighed. His hands fell to his sides as Andy stood up, the pain in his eyes replaced with a heartache Andy remembered all too well from the last time they parted. *I love you*, that look said, more than all the words and touches and everything else, *I love you and I can't live without you. I don't know how I'm even going to try.*

Andy moved aside as Herbert stepped between the poles above Sam's head. With Eli at the other end, the two of them lifted the stretcher, and Sam grabbed Andy's hand before they could move away. "Andy..."

Andy leaned down and silenced Sam with a tender kiss. "I'll find you, I swear it. Give me another few months, that's it. In the meantime, you get better, you hear me?"

Sam nodded, his cheek damp with tears where it pressed against Andy's face. His kisses were salty and sad, and he clung to Andy as if he'd never let him go.

"We managed three years apart," Andy whispered into Sam's hair. "Another few months will be nothing. You'll see."

"Every day will be an eternity without you," Sam replied. When Andy grinned, he cried, "It will be! Don't laugh."

"I won't laugh," Andy said, kissing him again. How could he? Sam's voice was so earnest and tired.

Andy kissed him once more before the soldiers started for the doorway, the stretcher carefully carried between them.

## A HEART DIVIDED

Sam held onto Andy's hand, making him walk alongside him. At the doorway Andy kissed Sam's hand, pressing his lips against Sam's skin and holding them there so his lover could feel the promise in them.

"Andy," Sam sighed as the soldiers stepped out into the night.

"He'll be fine," Herbert said, his voice low.

Andy nodded—he knew he would.

With a wary glance around them at the darkened woods, Herbert added, "You'd best stay here. You said you wouldn't follow..."

"I won't," Andy told him.

From the doorway of the cabin, he watched the soldiers disappear among the trees, their footsteps crunching through the dried leaves. Sam craned his neck back to look at him, and his eyes shone like stars in the night, watching until neither of them could see the other any longer. *He's going to be fine*, Andy told himself.

It was a small consolation, here, alone. Andy shivered with a sudden chill and wrapped his arms around himself. When had the night grown so dark, so cold? He still had to get back to his own camp, break down his tent, pack his belongings...*and douse the fire, and pack the supplies here.*

He felt tired—he wanted nothing more than the whole damn war to be over with already, was that too much to ask? *Just end it now. No more battles, no more fighting. Just end it all and let me have my boy back, please.*

Maybe that *was* asking too much. At least Sam was alive.

## A HEART DIVIDED

Though that was a comforting thought, it still left him cold, like light from a window that pushed the night away but didn't warm his soul. Sam had been right—the remaining days that stretched out into the future *were* an eternity, but they'd make it through somehow. They would have to.

He knew he should hurry, but now that he was alone, the sense of urgency draped over him had dissolved and he moved around the empty cabin like a ghost, unfettered and lost. He lit his lantern with a stick from the fire, then kicked the fire apart, dampening the ashes with water from his canteen before tossing dirt over the charred remains. He gathered together the supplies he had bought, which he wouldn't need now. The blanket he'd carried them in was gone, as it had been covering Sam when they placed him on the stretcher. But Andy knew the army was low on rations and he couldn't just leave the supplies to rot in the cabin, so he shoved as much as he could into his haversack. The soup he dumped outside in the bushes—it wasn't worth saving, no matter how hungry he might become—and with a last look around the cabin to make sure he'd left nothing behind, he shouldered his haversack and held the lamp out, lighting the way ahead.

*Sam is in good hands now. He will be fine.*

That thought was the only thing that kept Andy from following the soldiers, despite whatever promises he had made. After that shot of quinine, Sam had *looked* better, he sure started to *sound* better, and now that he was with his own regiment again, under a physician's care, he could *get* better, too.

## A HEART DIVIDED

*But I still want him with me,* Andy thought, kicking through the leaves. *Is that such a bad thing? That I want him here with me?*

He broke through the bushes into a clearing. He almost didn't recognize it—the last time he'd gone through this now empty field of freshly turned earth, bodies of fallen men had littered the ground. *The battlefield.* The leaves underfoot were gone, shoveled away when his men had buried the dead earlier that morning, and the ground beneath his feet was soft and pliant, like the fields back home after a new crop's seed was sown.

*If I hadn't ventured out into the woods last night, would they have had to bury Sam, too?*

Andy didn't know, but he didn't want to think about that.

Something moved ahead of him in the night. As he reached for his revolver, a low voice asked, "Is that the love worth dying for? Worth living for? Is *he* what you meant?"

Startled, Andy raised the lantern. The light cast a silvery glow onto the trees, making phantoms of their branches, and in their midst stood Wiley, arms crossed. Darkness pooled in his eyes and cheeks, shadows tossed from the flickering light, and Andy couldn't tell what expression was written on that face. "Wiley."

Wiley nodded, curt. "Anderson. Answer me."

Andy took a step back, then stood his ground. Clearing his throat, he dropped the lantern a little so he wasn't blinding either of them, and the shadows clawed across Wiley's face like battle scars. Instead of addressing Wiley's question, Andy



## A HEART DIVIDED

asked, "How did you find out?"

With a shrug, Wiley said, "I saw you leave camp. You slipped past the pickets but I knew you were gone, and where else would you go? Until last night you never left your tent."

"So you came to find me," Andy said, surprised at how even and calm his voice sounded to his own ears. *And now you know. You know he's a Union soldier. You know he's my boy. So where does that put us, Wiley?* "Now what?"

Wiley frowned. "I caught up with you here, but I kept back so you wouldn't see me."

"You saw the Federal," Andy said. It wasn't a question. "You saw me chase him and then what, Wiley? What did you do then?"

Wiley glared at the ground, lips clamped shut.

When he didn't answer, Andy pressed, "Did you look in the cabin? Did you see Sam in there?"

"Yes," Wiley whispered. "And I saw you come back with the soldier. I saw him leave—"

"Did you follow him?" Andy wanted to know.

A dull anger rose in him at the thought of Wiley watching him all along. He had *seen* the Union soldiers, he *knew*...

"Christ," Andy swore. "So you know where their camp is now, don't you? And you're going to attack at dawn, I bet. Forget about Petersburg—hell, do it now, why not? Ambush them while they sleep."

It would all be for naught. Despite his promises, he had unknowingly led the Confederate Army to the Union camp anyway, hadn't he? Despite the fact that for a few brief

## A HEART DIVIDED

moments in that cabin, there had *been* no lines, no sides, no enemies—just men working together to help another, men who might have been friends if not for the colors of their coats. Just average, everyday men...

"I didn't follow them," Wiley whispered, his voice a sigh like the wind through the trees. "How long have you two known each other? Not since just last night, not the way you held him."

Andy closed his eyes against tears of relief. "Seven years. He was my daddy's horser. He went west and was going to send for me." Choking back a sob, he blinked away the tears and added, "He took a bullet in the thigh. I didn't know he was in this war. I didn't know he was on the other side."

"Will he be all right?" Wiley asked. His arms were still crossed, but there was less aggression in his stance now, and the shadows across his face didn't seem as stark and foreboding as they had moments ago.

"Yes." They stood staring at each other for a long moment, and finally Andy ventured, "What now?"

Wiley sighed. "We leave in the morning, all of us. General Lee needs us to back him up in Petersburg."

He turned, heading back toward the Confederate encampment. A few steps into the woods, he looked over his shoulder and asked, "Are you coming?"

"Right behind you," Andy called out, hurrying after him. As he followed Wiley through the woods, he thought about what he'd said to his compatriot earlier. *See, Wiley? We can all be heroes in this war, Yank and Reb alike.*

## CHAPTER 20

*Seven weeks later*

Andy stood on the verandah and leaned heavily on the white-washed railing as he looked out over the fields. *His* fields. The crop his father had managed to get into the ground after the last frost was just beginning to come up now, tiny green shoots bursting through the dark soil, each one as bright and promising as the start of a new day. A few laborers worked among the plants—the naked backs of the white men looked tanned as leather from the house, and those of the few blacks Andy had hired after the war glistened with sweat, deep and dark as oiled ebony.

## A HEART DIVIDED

*After the war*, he mused, turning away from the fields. It had been over not yet a month and there were still pockets of fighting, groups of soldiers who hadn't heard the news. Andy had heard, first hand—he was one of the men with Lee's brigade by that point. During the surrender, he had sat outside the sturdy brick house at Appomattox Courthouse, staring across the dirt path at the Union soldiers who stared back at him.

They had all been nothing but weary men by then, tired of fighting a war that wasn't theirs. He had looked carefully at all of the dirt-streaked faces, but he didn't see Sam among them. Or Herbert, or even that sawbones Eli. He would have liked to meet those men outside of the war, to cross that no-man's land separating them once the surrender was announced, hold out his hand and shake theirs in friendship. *We might have been good friends, if not for the war. Sam liked them. Another time, another place, and we could've been inseparable.*

With a sad sigh, Andy sank into the hammock strung across the verandah. The war had ended. And the South had lost, as one side always had to do. Once he was discharged, Andy had planned on selling his part of the farm to his father, then use the money to help him find Sam again. They'd build a new life out west, just the two of them. During his regiment's long march to Appomattox, that had been the only thing on his mind.

But along the way he'd received a letter from his sister, Mary. He had known it was bad news from the smudge across his name—she was so meticulous about little things like that,

## A HEART DIVIDED

and the fact she hadn't blotted the smudge or used a new envelope filled him with dread. His fingers had trembled as he'd opened the envelope. For a brief moment the scent of magnolias and peaches wafted out, surrounding him in his dusty tent, filling him with a nostalgia for home so fierce it brought tears to his eyes.

*My dearest brother*, the letter began. He'd been right; it was bad news. *Our father, God rest his soul...* and Andy had closed his eyes, crumpling the thin parchment in his hands. *His heart gave out*, Mary wrote, and that was when the tears *did* come, coursing silently down Andy's cheeks. Dead, and now the farm was his, even if he didn't want it. He couldn't sell it, not now, and he had his sister to care for as well.

*Dead.*

After the surrender, whatever money he'd managed to save went to the crops and his father's debts, leaving him too broke to even *think* about buying a ticket west. And he didn't know Sam's regiment, didn't even know where they had last been stationed—somewhere in the wilds of Virginia was the closest he could come to pinpointing that cabin in the woods. "I'll be fine here," Mary kept assuring him. How many times had she pressed a handful of her own dollars into his hand, giving him permission to search out Sam? "You go up there and find him, do you hear me? You find him and bring him back."

But the crops were just beginning to come in, and Andy had used the money to pay laborers from town to tend to the fields. He bought Mary a new dress, too, something pretty to wear to church, because she had so selflessly given too much

## A HEART DIVIDED

of her time and money to the farm already. She'd run it once their father passed, and Andy could only begin to imagine how hard that had been for her, a woman, alone, saddled with the duties of a farmer.

And still she sat up late with Andy every night, helping him pen ads to place in the Virginia papers and write letters to their few friends that far north, asking if they knew of a young man with coppery hair and eyes like emeralds who had been wounded in battle during the war.

*It's no use*, Andy thought, lying back in the hammock. He pulled his hat down over his face and breathed deep the sweaty scent that clung to the band. *It's been too long now, too long since the surrender, and I don't know where he is. I've lost him all over again.*

His only consolation was he had yet to receive a letter from St. Louis—he dreaded that more than anything else. *I have a letter there*, Sam had said, and Andy could still hear the words echo through his mind. He knew it would be a plain envelope, nothing but his name writ in a flourish across the front and an unknown address in the corner. He could almost read the words Sam would have written when he opened the account in Andy's name. *My love*, the letter probably said, *if you are reading this, then I am dead.*

Frustration curled within him and he sighed. Sam *wasn't* dead, Andy *knew* it. If he were, Andy knew he'd feel it in his heart, his soul. His very breath would catch in his throat and life would drain of color.

But Andy didn't know where the hell Sam might be, and

## A HEART DIVIDED

somehow, that was worse. How could the world go on when he didn't have Sam with him?

He wasn't sure, but in the warm May morning, he could hear the low singing of men in the fields and a horse's hooves clattering some distance away, coupled with the silvery jingle of a harness. A gentle wind set the hammock rocking, just slightly, just enough to make his head dizzy and disoriented. Sam was alive, he assured himself as his eyes slipped shut beneath his hat. *I just can't find him. Rather, I haven't found him yet. I will, though. I know I will. I have to.*

And how would he do that?

He didn't know. In the morning's post, he had received a letter he hoped would help him in his search. Postmarked *Richmond*, from Chimborazo Hospital. He had wanted to wait until Mary returned from her trip into town to read the missive, because he knew she was just as anxious as he over word of Sam. But after a half hour, he had torn into the envelope, his heart racing in his chest as he scanned the contents of the letter. *To whom it may concern...patient records are confidential, and we cannot honor your request for information.*

Damn it. A form letter. Another dead end.

As Andy had unfolded the piece of paper, he noticed someone had scribbled something at the bottom. A secretary or nurse, perhaps, someone who had read his heart and soul poured into the words of the letter he had sent, wrote in smeared ink, *No Talley here. Sorry.*

The note had slipped from his nerveless fingers to the floor

## A HEART DIVIDED

of his parlor, where it still rested because he hadn't felt like picking it up.

*Sorry.*

Part of him had hoped Sam would have made it to the hospital and his name would be in the records. Until the letter came dispelling that hope, Andy hadn't realized how much he'd *expected* his lover to be at Richmond, healing with the other wounded from the war. *Sam, where the hell have you disappeared to? Why don't you write to me? Even just a card to let me know you're still out there. Please.*

The clap of hooves on hard packed dirt grew louder, a rhythmic tattoo announcing an arriving carriage. A woman's laughter, bubbly like cheap champagne, rippled beneath the moan of the springboard.

*Mary.*

She had left first thing that morning, headed into town to do some shopping, and even though she had asked Andy to come along as well, he'd said no. "I can't tell you not to hope," she'd whispered as she kissed his cheek, "but please don't let it consume you, Anderson. You'll find him, you'll see."

She had so much faith. Andy knew the letter on the floor of the parlor would hurt her as much as it hurt him. He almost wished he had the energy to push up off the hammock, hurry into the parlor, and burn the missive in the fire just to keep the pain to himself.

The carriage stopped in front of the house, as he knew it would. He heard the creak of the door as it opened, and heavy



## A HEART DIVIDED

footsteps tripped down the two wooden steps. Mary laughed again, and the urge grew in Andy to run inside and toss the letter away so she could hold onto this brief happiness a little while longer.

But he didn't move, and within a few moments, it was already too late. He heard her crossing the verandah slowly, each step punctuated with a hollow thud like a pole or a cane. *A pick, perhaps*, he thought, the hammock swinging beneath him gently as she approached. They needed a new pick for the hay in the barn, and she'd mentioned the dry goods store in town had one for a good price. She probably purchased it with her own savings, God bless her.

Without removing his hat from his face, Andy called out, "You're home early." His voice sounded muffled and flat beneath the hat.

"Actually," a man said, "I'm a little late."

Andy's heart quickened at the sound of that voice, *his* voice, no longer hoarse and sore with fever but strong, sure, *alive...*

The hint of a smile brightened Sam's voice. "I'm sorry I kept you waiting."

Andy sat up too quickly and the world spun away beneath him. As his hat fell from his face, the hammock flipped over, dumping him unceremoniously to the floor. Pushing the hammock out of his way, he looked up and found Sam smiling down at him.

He looked older than Andy remembered him, his young face lined and too damn thin. He leaned heavily on a thick

## *A HEART DIVIDED*

cane and his hair was cut, his face clean, his Union uniform replaced with a modest suit.

But it was *him*. Mary stood behind him, a wide smile on her face as she struggled not to cry.

“Sam,” Andy sighed, reaching for his lover. He glanced at his sister, who nodded and dabbed her eyes with a handkerchief. “My Lord, is it really you?”

Favoring his bad leg, Sam let himself be pulled down into Andy’s lap. Then his lips were on Andy’s skin, his hands smoothing back Andy’s hair, his kisses as heady as magnolia blossoms in full bloom. “It’s me,” he whispered, cradling Andy’s face in his hands.

Andy held Sam as tight as he dared, afraid he might slip through his arms like a ghost in the night. “I couldn’t find you.”

“I’m here now,” Sam replied. “I’m here and I’m never leaving you again.”

His strong arms held Andy close and the warm press of their bodies erased all the moments they had lost, all the times spent apart. Every sweet kiss was the promise of the days left to come, each one an eternity, stretching out for the rest of their lives.

## J. M. SNYDER

An author of gay erotic/romantic fiction, J. M. Snyder began self-publishing gay erotic fiction in 2002. Since then, Snyder has released several books in trade paperback format and has begun exploring the world of e-publishing, working with Amber Quill Press and other e-publishers. Snyder's highly erotic short gay fiction has been published online at *Ruthie's Club*, *Tit-Elation*, *Sticky Pen*, and Amazon Shorts, as well as in anthologies by Aspen Mountain Press and Cleis Press. A full bibliography, as well as free fiction, book excerpts, purchasing information, and exclusive contests, can be found at:

<http://jmsnyder.net>

\* \* \*

**Don't miss *Under A Confederate Moon*, by J. M. Snyder  
available at [AmberAllure.com](http://AmberAllure.com)!**

*The year is 1863. Caleb Chilson is a private in the Confederate Army, currently camped in the Virginian woods. Most of his time is spent on picket duty, on the lookout for a Yankee attack. But when the moon is full, he manages to slip*

*away from the encampment and into the woods to become something a little less than human...*

*Bitten as a teen, Caleb now suffers through a painful transformation from human to bobcat a few days each month. As a bobcat, he leaves behind his camp and fellow soldiers to explore the night. But a gunshot and the bright scent of fresh blood draws him to a clearing where he learns that he isn't the only one of his kind.*

*Wounded and hurt, Brance is a loner by nature, gruff and grumbling, who doesn't want anything to do with Caleb...at first. The younger bobcat prevails, and starts to win Brance over, until they turn human again and find themselves on opposite sides of the American Civil War.*

# AMBER QUILL PRESS, LLC

## THE GOLD STANDARD IN PUBLISHING

QUALITY BOOKS  
IN BOTH PRINT AND ELECTRONIC FORMATS

ACTION/ADVENTURE

SUSPENSE/THRILLER

SCIENCE FICTION

DARK FANTASY

MAINSTREAM

ROMANCE

HORROR

EROTICA

FANTASY

GLBT

WESTERN

MYSTERY

PARANORMAL

HISTORICAL

**BUY DIRECT AND SAVE**  
[www.AmberQuill.com](http://www.AmberQuill.com)  
[www.AmberHeat.com](http://www.AmberHeat.com)  
[www.AmberAllure.com](http://www.AmberAllure.com)