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THE SENTINELS OF ANDERSONVILLE

CHRISTY AWARD WINNING AUTHOR

Tracy Groot



Praise for Tracy Groot

“Groot has done good historical homework. She has also created memorable characters both major and minor. . . . The pacing is page-turning.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY, starred review

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“Groot . . . does good historical work with details and subtle psychological work with her characters. . . . WWII-era novels are popular; this is a superior, page-turning entry in that niche.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY on *Flame of Resistance*

“This well-researched novel is filled with intrigue and captivating characters that should please fans of World War II fiction.”

CBA RETAILERS+RESOURCES on *Flame of Resistance*

“Scrupulously researched and lovingly written, *Flame of Resistance* plunges the reader into an exhilarating story of courage, grace, and one endearing woman’s leap of faith.”

THE BANNER

“Groot ensnares readers with accurate historical detail and gripping prose. With complex characters, authentically reflecting good and evil . . . , [*Flame of Resistance*] overflows with intrigue, passion, sacrifice, and humanity.”

RELZ REVIEWZ

“Tracy Groot adds fine research on [D-Day] and [the] World War II environment, both of which make *Flame of Resistance* a powerful saga that . . . retells the story of Rahab.”

MIDWEST BOOK REVIEW

“The suspense is great, the characters excellent, the romance held in check, and the spiritual elements are extremely encouraging. For those who enjoy historical fiction, but don’t care for a strong romantic storyline, *Flame of Resistance* is an excellent choice.”

THE CHRISTIAN MANIFESTO

“Gritty and moving, *Flame of Resistance* . . . raises challenging questions about redemption, perceptions, and the cost of doing the right thing in an evil world. I highly recommend it.”

SARAH SUNDIN, author of *On Distant Shores*

“[A] well-paced, beautifully written historical novel. . . . Entertaining and compelling.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY, starred review of *Madman*

“Groot cleverly combines historical research, Scripture, and thrilling imagination to create an ingenious story built around the Gerasene demoniac. It’s one of the best fictional adaptations of a biblical event I’ve had the pleasure to read.”

ASPIRING RETAIL magazine on *Madman*

“Groot’s well-drawn characters . . . embody mercy in this subtle tale that cleverly avoids retelling New Testament stories, instead forming a sort of commentary by telling parallel stories.”

BOOKLIST, starred review of *Stones of My Accusers*

“[*The Brother’s Keeper* is a] lyrical and affecting first novel.”

BOOKLIST, starred review

THE
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OF
ANDERSONVILLE

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The Sentinels of Andersonville

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Note to the Reader

DURING THE LAST FOURTEEN MONTHS of the Civil War, Andersonville Prison in Sumter County, Georgia, was a place of unimaginable suffering. In fourteen months, 45,000 men passed through the gates. Of those, 13,000 died, primarily from starvation and exposure.

Portions of this book contain disturbing descriptions of prison life and conditions. In the matter of historicity, novelists often wrestle with the question of how much to put in, how much to leave out—too little detail risks giving an incomplete picture; too much risks becoming gratuitous. Since detail is necessary to tell the truth of Andersonville Prison, I chose to err on the side of truth; and even so, a few facts refused to flow from my pen.

All descriptions are taken from source materials including diaries, memoirs, letters, and archival documents such as the transcript of the trial of Henry Wirz, courtesy of the Library of Congress. The descriptions came from those who lived it.

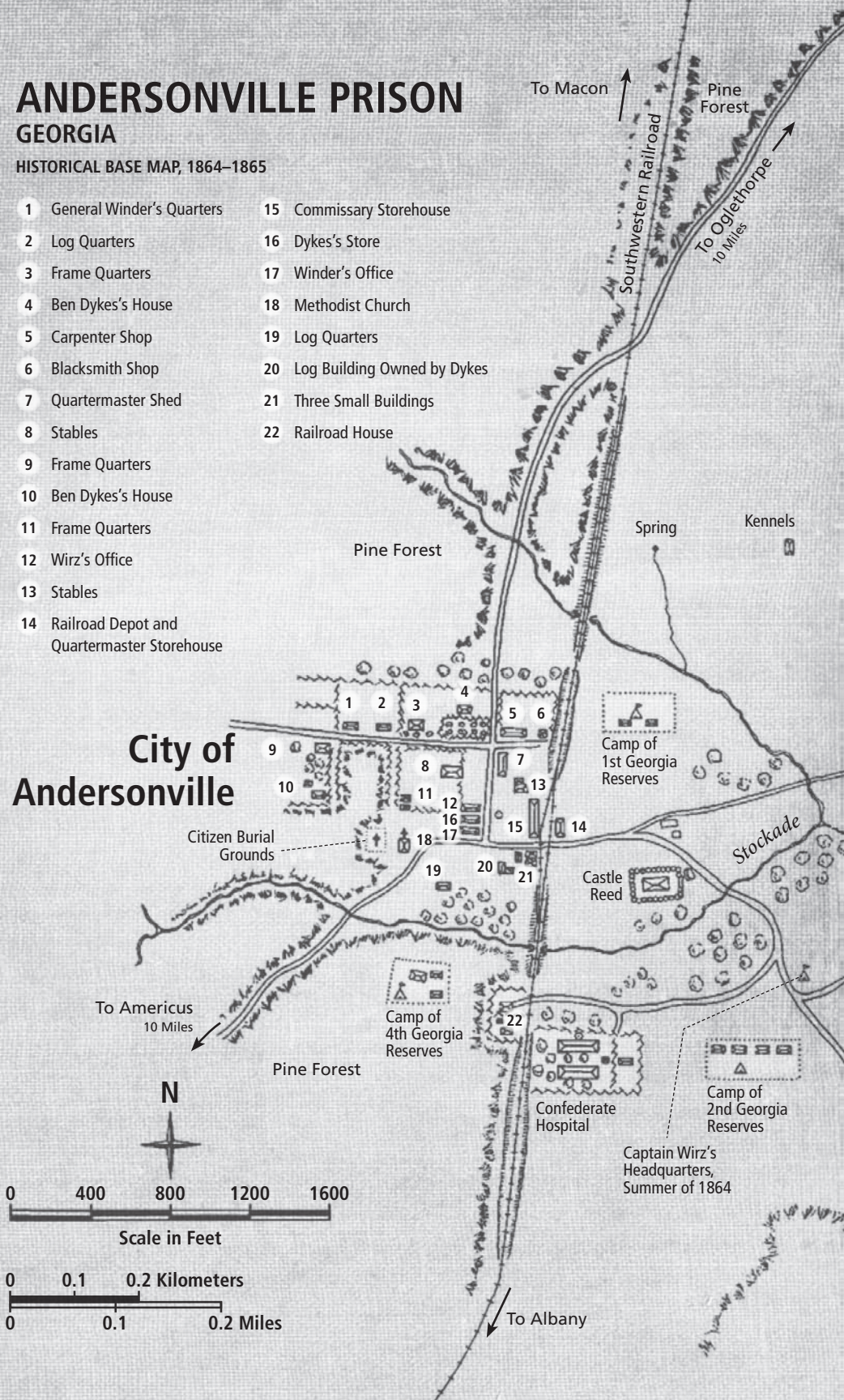
—*T. G.*

ANDERSONVILLE PRISON GEORGIA

HISTORICAL BASE MAP, 1864-1865

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| 1 General Winder's Quarters | 15 Commissary Storehouse |
| 2 Log Quarters | 16 Dykes's Store |
| 3 Frame Quarters | 17 Winder's Office |
| 4 Ben Dykes's House | 18 Methodist Church |
| 5 Carpenter Shop | 19 Log Quarters |
| 6 Blacksmith Shop | 20 Log Building Owned by Dykes |
| 7 Quartermaster Shed | 21 Three Small Buildings |
| 8 Stables | 22 Railroad House |
| 9 Frame Quarters | |
| 10 Ben Dykes's House | |
| 11 Frame Quarters | |
| 12 Wirz's Office | |
| 13 Stables | |
| 14 Railroad Depot and
Quartermaster Storehouse | |

City of Andersonville



Citizen Burial Grounds

Camp of
1st Georgia
Reserves

Stockade

To Americus
10 Miles

Camp of
4th Georgia
Reserves

Pine Forest

Castle
Reed

Camp of
2nd Georgia
Reserves

Confederate
Hospital

Captain Wirz's
Headquarters,
Summer of 1864

N

0 400 800 1200 1600

Scale in Feet

0 0.1 0.2 Kilometers

0 0.1 0.2 Miles

To Macon

Southwestern Railroad

Pine Forest

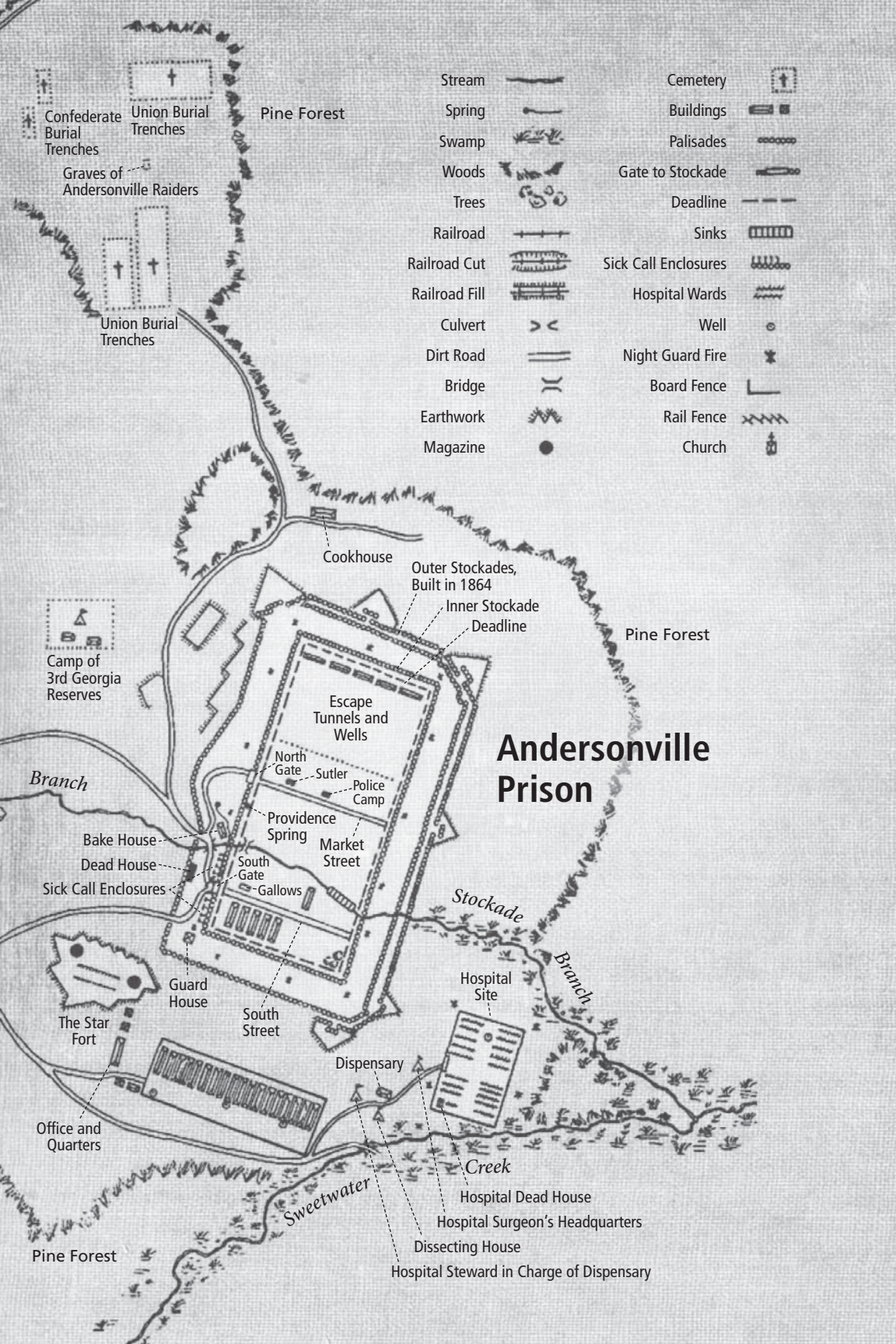
To Oglethorpe
10 Miles

Pine Forest

Spring

Kennels

To Albany



Confederate
Burial
Trenches

Union Burial
Trenches

Graves of
Andersonville Raiders

Union Burial
Trenches

Pine Forest

- Stream
- Spring
- Swamp
- Woods
- Trees
- Railroad
- Railroad Cut
- Railroad Fill
- Culvert
- Dirt Road
- Bridge
- Earthwork
- Magazine

- Cemetery
- Buildings
- Palisades
- Gate to Stockade
- Deadline
- Sinks
- Sick Call Enclosures
- Hospital Wards
- Well
- Night Guard Fire
- Board Fence
- Rail Fence
- Church

Camp of
3rd Georgia
Reserves

Cookhouse

Outer Stockades,
Built in 1864

Inner Stockade
Deadline

Pine Forest

Andersonville Prison

Escape
Tunnels and
Wells

North
Gate

Sutler

Police
Camp

Providence
Spring

Market
Street

South
Gate

Gallows

Branch

Bake House

Dead House

Sick Call Enclosures

The Star
Fort

Guard
House

South
Street

Office and
Quarters

Dispensary

Hospital
Site

Stockade
Branch

Pine Forest

Sweetwater
Creek

Hospital Dead House

Hospital Surgeon's Headquarters

Dissecting House

Hospital Steward in Charge of Dispensary

GEORGIA



Prologue

JUNE 1864

KENNESAW MOUNTAIN, GEORGIA

“Ya killed yet, blue belly?”

He woke to the taste of gunpowder on his lips.

Lew was holding his last shot. The other hand was full of rifle. He'd fallen asleep in the middle of loading, and some paper from a cartridge was stuck to his lip. He spit it away.

“Why don't you come and see?” he hollered back. Didn't come out as a holler. Came out as a dry croak.

“Got water for ya.”

“Don't need it. I'm drinkin' the blood of my comrades.”

“Well, ain't you a regular Davy Crockett.”

The voice came from the woods at the perimeter of the battlefield—if you could call it a field. A clearing, more like, not bigger than Carrie's kitchen garden. Only Carrie's garden had vegetables in it, not piles of dead men.

“You have brought up an interesting point on our collective

history,” Lew said. He waited for spit to speak again, and realized things were quiet. “Where’s the rest of your boys?”

No answer.

Lew grinned. “Why, you are all alone, Johnny Reb. They moved on and charged you with the task to collect me. You know I’m a good aim.”

“Haven’t seen better,” the Reb called generously.

“How many did I get, last go-around?”

“Two.”

“You sore about that?”

Silence, and Lew’s grin eased. “Hope I didn’t tag a friend.”

Finally, “Aw. Not takin’ it personal. Woulda done the same in your spot.”

“Let’s discuss prisoner exchange: I’ll catch up with my boys, you catch up with yours, and we’ll call it even. Tell ’em you waited me out, and I died of my wound.”

“What wound?”

A year ago at Gettysburg, Lew had taken a ball in the shoulder and figured that would put paid on all future ills. But early this morning, after a hot and heavy skirmish and orders to move out, he got up to follow Robert, and to his surprise, his leg did not comply.

When Lew didn’t answer, the Reb said, “What’s the interesting point on our collective history?”

“It’s this: Which side can claim Crockett for his own?”

“Why, the South, of course. He was a Tennessee man.”

“Oh, you’re missin’ the point entire.” Lew grasped his last shot, and let his hand fall. “I’m tired of this, Johnny. You clear out. Clear out!”

“You’re gettin’ irritable.”

Lew and this unseen Reb had exchanged jeers until conversation became amiable. He’d heard other Johnnies yell at this Reb to end

it, something easily done with an organized assault. Lew was in the middle of a clearing on a bluff, dug in behind the piled-up bodies of his men. A sheer drop behind left only a two-thirds radius for which to be vigilant, but the fellow must have been of some minor rank, or maybe the boys respected him, because no assault had come.

Lew waited for spit. "I aim to catch up with my regiment. I recommend you get yourself scarce before I come out, for I am determined."

He let his head fall back on Robert. He closed his eyes and was just about seeing Carrie again. Robert had died hours earlier. He came back when Lew didn't follow, and got it in the neck.

"Where ya wounded, blue belly? Sure isn't your mouth."

"My name is Lew." He just wanted to sleep and could do it right against a dead man. He was fearsome tired, due in some measure to his wound.

"I know it. Gill told me. Didn't think it was polite to use 'til you gave it."

Lew's eyes came open. "Harris Gill? Is he all right?"

"He's walkin'. Got a message for you. Said, 'Tell Lew to drop his gun and come along.' Said if he's gotta wait the war out, he wants to wait it out with you."

"Not likely. He said, 'I hope Lew guts ya head to toe,' and probably added some impolite observations about your parentage."

A pause. Then, "That's about right. Cussin'est man I ever met. Ever' time you laid in a good shot, he rang out a vile sort of hallelujah. But back to your 'point entire' which you said I am missin'. What point entire?"

The voice was closer. It was the closest anyone from the perimeter had dared to come yet. Lew couldn't see him. The stand of woods was thick and dim and Rebs always took good cover.

"Why, the sadness of it all, Johnny. What would our foredaddies say

about this fighting? Don't you feel a bit queer over the fact that George Washington is *my* foredaddy as well as yours? This is not a normal war, for we are kin. If my grandkids carried on this way, it'd break my heart."

"I have thought on it. Weren't we hellfire and brimstone for a fight, couple years back? Wish the politicians've had it like we have."

"Stick 'em out here, the war would be done in a day."

"That's our thinkin', too. Listen: You lay down that rifle and come along. Your men wish for you to accompany them to their temporary accommodations, courtesy of Jefferson Davis."

"I must respectfully decline your hospitable offer." He waited for spit again. He hadn't had any water since early morning. It was heading past thirst into torment. "A man isn't made for confinement. I'd rather buy my passage on a battlefield than be bored to death in a stockade any day."

"I reckon your Carrie would see it different."

"Oh . . . doggone it." Lew felt the fight go right out of him.

What was boredom compared to seeing her face just one more time? One more time, God willing, and he'd die a man redeemed.

A twig snapped on his right. He groaned. "Don't make me shoot you."

"No terms except an unconditional and immediate surrender can be accepted," came the cheerful reply.

Lew grinned, and it rolled into a laugh. Ulysses S. Grant's very words to Fort Donelson, apparently famous enough to make the rounds in Rebel lines. Grant's victory at Fort Donelson had been a disaster for the South. It opened up Tennessee for a Northern advance. Lew tossed the last shot aside. He couldn't shoot him now. He couldn't shoot him a long time ago.

By now Lew knew the fellow came from Alabama, had a twist of tobacco if Lew had coffee, couldn't pick between Rosaline and Irene, and was currently reading number 5 or 6 of *Nicholas Nickleby*—his

reading had improved considerable since being in the Confederate army, and he felt his station in life would certainly improve. Might even get himself a job at the new telegraph office in Huntsville. In turn, the Reb had learned that Lew and Carrie had a small fruit farm in Ezra, north and west of Gettysburg, where he grew apples, cherries, peaches, walnuts, and blueberries. He had four children, and didn't know the name of the last. And at thirty-two, he was the oldest private in his regiment. Some called him Pap.

Another rustle. Lew sighed. "I am not gonna shoot you and you know it. Just get on, and we'll—"

"Why, das right nice o' you, Yank."

Lew looked left, and there on a rock stood a big greasy man with a tobacco-stained beard and a mossy green leer.

He was not at all what Lew expected. One look told what sort of man this was—a forager, a bummer, a skulker, and the worst sort. It wasn't the stuffed haversacks slung over his shoulders. It wasn't the knapsack stenciled with the 12th Pennsylvania. It wasn't the Union pistols in his hands, and it wasn't the filthy blouse stretched tight over a gut that had no cause to bulge if he lived the hard life of a decent soldier. It was Colonel Ford's brass-buttoned coat. It had a new hole ripped into the side, jagged, darkened, wet.

The man looked down at the coat. "He wudden even daid yet. Look at dem buttons. Two rows!" He cackled. "Cain't believe my luck."

Colonel Ford had once halted an entire column to gaze on a quiet meadow carpeted in wildflowers. *Let it stouten your hearts, boys*, he'd hollered with joy. *There is beauty yet in this world.*

"Had to keel 'nuther Yank runt half-daid hisself, cuz he wudden gone lemme git 'im. Lil squawkin' pisspot. I made *him* squawk . . ."

Charley Reed, the regiment's drummer boy. Colonel Ford's honorary aide. He was thirteen.

"I didn't take you for a baby killer, you bottom-feeding carp."

The skulker stilled. Then the pistols came up, but before he got off a shot, an explosion, and the man fell. He tried to get up—another shot, and he lay still.

A man came moving smooth out of the thicket, crouched, rifle leveled.

This Reb was younger, cleaner, leaner, with long yellow hair flowing out from his brown slouch hat. He wore red-and-white-checked homespun, tucked into brown trousers. He lowered his rifle when he saw the other was dead.

Lew croaked, “Now *you* resemble your voice. How come you killed one of your own?”

“He had bad grammar. We don’t put up with that down here.” He picked his way over bodies to Lew’s corpse-built breastworks. He propped his rifle against the stack of dead men, unslung his canteen, and tossed it to Lew. Then he settled at once to a long, considering look at Lew, as if recalling their entire faceless conversation and fastening every word to this particular corporeal being.

Lew in turn did a study of his own, and the blond man ten years younger soon became the one who spoke of Rosaline and Irene, and reading considerable better.

But the Reb took longer to scout out the terrain of Lewis Gann. He had an earnest face with interested blue eyes that would be done when they were done, and not a trace of self-consciousness attended his inspection. In fact it was such a thorough winnowing that Lew couldn’t help smiling, and he did so simply because he liked the man.

A smile soon answered, and the perusal was done. “Hello, blue belly. I am Emery Jones, and you are shot up some.”

“Yep.”

“Reckon you can move?”

“With help.”

“Let’s get on, then, to your temporary accommodations.”

“Where we headed?”

“Place called Andersonville, and I am your escort. It is a spell from Kennesaw, but once there you get to wait out the war. I just about envy you.”

“We’ve heard of Andersonville. I’m not sure I envy me.”

“Don’t believe everything you hear. *I* heard you Yanks were fear-some ignorant, but early on in our conversation you used the word *perpetuity*.”

“I did, didn’t I?”

“I will sit here and shoot you in perpetuity.’ Boy, you’ve got some Grant in you. I knew then I had to save your life.”

“I could’ve taken that bad grammar man,” Lew said indignantly. Emery shook his head. “Saved it ’fore then.”

“How so?”

“Well, I would tell you, but you look as though . . .”

And he was off and dreaming of Carrie again.

PART ONE

Q: From your observation of the condition and surroundings of our prisoners—their food, their drink, their exposure by day and by night, and all the circumstances you have described—state your professional opinion as to what proportion of deaths occurring there were the result of the circumstances and surroundings which you have narrated.

A: I feel myself safe in saying that seventy-five per cent of those who died might have been saved, had those unfortunate men been properly cared for as to food, clothing, bedding, &c.

—TESTIMONY OF DR. JOHN C. BATES, FROM THE TRIAL OF HENRY WIRZ

1

JULY 1864

ANDERSONVILLE PRISON

Two men stood sheltered from the blazing sun in a sentry box at the top of the stockade wall. One thought of his rheumatic knee, and one thought of Violet Stiles.

Violet Stiles had large blue eyes and other features Dance Pickett could never remember, subjugated as they were by the eyes. So, wanting still to conjure her face, he allowed aspects of her nature to form the forgotten features: She was naïve, patriotic, self-righteous, kind (he allowed her that), and merry (he couldn't be unfair, she had laughed heartily at the antics of the younger sisters at the Stiles dinner table last Sunday); but naïve, patriotic, and self-righteous were the overriding elements of her nature, and they fashioned a caricature image of a dark-haired girl with gigantic blue eyes and tiny everything else, including figure and feet. It was like looking through field glasses at the wrong end to find great, startling eyes, with all else crabbed and distant.

Violet Stiles represented all that Dance despised in Southern womanry. He didn't despise women as a general rule, but he hated what the war brought out of them. Violet was like all the rest, a fire-breathing patriot determined to do her duty by any hapless Confederate soldier who had the misfortune to cross her path. Did she suppose men actually *wanted* to be fussed over and praised and—worst of all—*encouraged* for the Cause? She was so *meaning* and *feeling* and *earnest*—the most ignorant, galling, entertaining creature he'd ever met.

The guard next to him shifted, and Dance stopped laughing.

No wonder they didn't like him. At least they left him alone. He touched the shoulder strap of his leather scrip. In there was a bit of his favorite Shakespeare, and he decided to indulge the fellow.

"Burr, hear me out, and I'll confer on you something fine: The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling, doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven; and as imagination bodies forth the form of things unknown, the poet's pen—" Dance paused for dramatic effect, allowing, hopefully, his listener to form a pen in his mind—"turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name."

"Pickett, I don't know as I should hit you or treat you kindly," said Burr. "If you was my boy, I'd beat you half to death and let the good Lord take care of the rest."

The leather pouch had been a Christmas gift from his mother when he was a boy, carried in the Revolution, she said, by her grandfather. Dance had examined it for signs of Revolution. The nick on the flap, surely from a musket ball. Stains were surely blood. Mother seemed to know just what her son would do with it: make it into a sanctuary.

Early on he took particular care with the papers he put into the scrip. They were quotes and isms, poetry and prose, declarations and decrees and bits of airy nothing, and nothing could go in there indiscriminately.

The result was such that his scrip powered him through his first two years at the University of Georgia. It powered him through the patriotism of his father and the death of his mother. But it had no power here. He had not opened his scrip since the day he was posted to the garrison at Andersonville Prison, for the stockade was a different sort of sanctuary, and two sanctuaries could not exist in the same place. It was a law of religion or physics.

“Here they come,” Burr grunted.

Dance took his eyes from the men in the stockade to the men approaching the stockade, coming through the stand of pines from the Andersonville depot, a quarter mile distant. They came in long shambling columns, Captain Wirz riding his old gray mare alongside.

“Run, you fools,” Dance muttered.

They were two hundred or so, held in check by Wirz’s commands and curses and occasionally brandished pistol, as well as thirty or so armed members of the Georgia militia and any escorting regulars. Dance looked away.

He shifted his weight to the other leg, glanced from habit to his ancient musket propped at his side, and fell once more to the interesting ponderation of Miss Violet Stiles. Dance selected an early Stiles Sunday dinner and rolled it out on his mind’s stage.

Stiles Sunday Dinner. Volume Two.

Characters: The entire Stiles household, the mayor of Americus and his wife, Dance Pickett, and another member of the Georgia militia, an uncouth geezer on burial duty named Linney.

Act One: Dance must endure the patronizing efforts of Miss Stiles to engage Linney in conversation.

“I understand you are posted at the prison, Mr. Linney,” Violet said, her voice cultured enough to jelly eels. “How do you find the work?”

Linney stopped midchew, surprised and not altogether happy to find attention on him. They might, after all, see him slip biscuits

into his dirty vest. Linney gulped some wine and sent a look to Dr. Stiles, who was busy cutting meat for one of the younger girls and admonishing her to chew carefully.

“Reckon I find it all right. ’Cept I cain’t talk about it or I’ll git in trouble.”

“Your discretion does you credit. Security is very important, for Yankee spies abound. I understand General Winder has called down detectives from Richmond. Goodness, what an important job you have. You are certainly our protector.” She gave a little shudder, and Dance gripped his cutlery. She recovered from her theatrical musings, and asked brightly, “Where are you from, Mr. Linney?”

“Skull Gully. More of dem peas, ma’am. Some of dem biscuits.”

“Please,” Dance prompted.

“Please,” said Linney.

“Certainly, Mr. Linney,” said Violet with a frosty glance at Dance. “Tell me, Mr. Linney, where is Skull Gully?” said she, all melodic politeness once more.

“South.”

“It must be a very nice town.”

“It’s a swamp. More o’ dat wine, ma’am. Please.”

“But it isn’t polite,” protested the youngest Stiles girl. “You’ve already had three glassfuls. Mercy me.”

Dance choked on a biscuit. Violet’s gaze rained down violence on the girl.

“Why, certainly, Mr. Linney.” Violet reached for the wine.

“I won’t tolerate it,” the little girl said, and snatched the decanter. “He is being rude and we do not tolerate rudeness at this table.”

“Posey Stiles,” Violet breathed, eyes glowing red.

This time Dance couldn’t hide the laughter.

It caught the attention of the oft-distracted Mrs. Stiles, who smiled with bemused approval at her laughing guest and returned

to remonstrate with the other girls while keeping conversation with the mayor's wife.

"Such a lovely brooch, Esme. It's only a little gristle, Daisy, eat it. You should wear it more often, I've not seen it since the pink taffeta last Christmas. Rosie, wipe your mouth. I declare."

"Say your name again to me," Dance asked of the little girl with the decanter safely between her knees, "for you are my favorite Stiles, and I wish to remember it always."

She smiled up at him, glorious in her defense of the family wine, triumphant that someone admired it.

"I am Posey Eden Stiles, called so because my sisters are Violet, Lily, Rose, and Daisy, and when I came along Papa said I made a posy. So though I am *officially* Pansy, I am *called* Posey and I like it right fine."

"You like it very much," Violet corrected severely.

"Mr. Linney said *right fine* a minute ago, and I liked it."

"I like Posey right fine, too," said Dance. "And you were entirely correct to waylay this man from drinking all your wine. Such rudeness should be corrected, and hastily." He looked at Linney, who was slipping a spoon into his vest. "Linney, guardian and protector of genteel Southern womenry, I request that you apologize for your rudeness, and return to the table your recent acquisitions."

That had been the first time he saw Violet mad. But Volume Eight was the memorable best. Dance had gloried to see that a methodical chipping away had at last revealed the true Violet. On that infamous evening he had seen in full what had only peeked from behind a well-bred cloak—a tempestuous nature nigh unto feral, not at all civilly Southern as he was sure she had supposed. He didn't trot out Volume Eight very often. He saved it for when things were especially bad. Today was tolerable. He couldn't remember Volume Nine. It did trouble him some.

Violet Wrassey Stiles desperately needed guidance at this critical juncture in her young life. *Someone* needed to devote delicate method to make it clear that Volume Eight Violet was the one to be admired, not fought and subdued in favor of the other person he didn't much like at all. Clearly Dr. and Mrs. Stiles had a handful with that one, and would not mind the kind intervention of a concerned distant cousin—

“Strike me dumb,” said Burr. “Look over there.”

What Dance saw first made him squint, then made him lunge to the rail. A girl came out of the pines, following at some distance the columns of prisoners. He gripped the rail.

“That a *woman*?” Burr said.

“It's Violet Stiles,” Dance breathed.

“Uh-oh.” He had heard of the Sunday dinners. “What's *she* doin' here?”

“She can't see this.” He broke and ran for the ladder.

“Where you goin', Pickett? Pickett! Oh, let her see, I say! Don't no one ever see. Fancy-pants what never put themselves in the way of mizry will find naught but mizry at the end.”

Burr suspected he had said something wise, thought it should be wrote down, set himself to memorize it on account he couldn't write, then caught sight of a Yankee too close to the deadline and grabbed his musket. “I see you, Old Abe,” he bellowed down into the stockade. “Do not try me today, for I am in a foul temper'ment.”