

Contents

1. Leah Makes a Decision	9
2. Friends Fall Out	21
3. Drake Sees a Miracle	31
4. Drake Takes a Prisoner	40
5. Colonel Majors and His Nurse	52
6. Charlie Makes a Decision	62
7. Worse Than a Chigger	72
8. A Proposal	83
9. "What's Going On?"	96
10. Rosie Steps In	102
11. A New Man	109
12. Disaster for Leah	116
13. "With This Ring . . ."	125
14. A Dress for Charlie	135
15. The Prettiest Girl at the Ball	143
16. The End and the Beginning	153
17. Jeff Has a Visitor	156

1

Leah Makes a Decision

With a grunt, Leah Carter tugged at the buttons on the back of her dress. She struggled so violently that her face turned red, but no matter how hard she tried she simply could not fasten the garment.

"I'm getting to be nothing but a great big cow!" In a gesture of despair, Leah ran her hands through her blonde hair and stared at her image in the mirror. "Nothing but a big cow!"

Her full lower lip extended in a pout. Impatiently she pulled the dress over her head, held it up, stared at it angrily. She knew that it was foolish to be angry at the dress.

She glanced then at the homemade calendar on the wall and noted the date. June 20, 1864. The memory of that day a year ago came to her, and she lowered the dress slowly and sat down on the edge of the bed. The cornshuck mattress whispered and rustled.

"It was just a year ago today that I got this dress," she whispered. "I was so proud of it—and Jeff was too." She held up the garment. It was royal blue with beautifully executed bone buttons at the back, white cuffs, and a white collar to match. She remembered how Jeff had taken her for a walk down the streets of Richmond and how he had whispered, "You're the prettiest girl in Richmond, Leah Carter!"

As Leah remembered, a dreamy look came into her blue-green eyes. She thought of Jeff Majors and wished that the dress still fit.

Then she thought of the party she was invited to at Lucy Driscoll's house tonight, and she threw the dress across the room. It sailed through the air, hit the wall, and dropped in a crumpled heap on the worn, blue-figured carpet.

Leah walked around the confines of her small bedroom, coming finally to stand at the window. She stared at the tall oaks lining the dusty road that led to Richmond in one direction and to the Driscoll house in the other. It was a fine day, and soon Jeff would be coming down that road to take her to Lucy's party. She felt a sudden twinge of jealousy.

"I bet Lucy will have a dress sent all the way from France on one of the blockade runners," she muttered. She turned from the window, walked over to the large, polished, walnut wardrobe, and stared inside again, although she knew it was hopeless. She pawed through her few dresses and wished that she had the green dress that she had left at her home back in Kentucky. And then she shook her head. *That one would be too small too!*

The big black-and-white cat lying in the center of her bed lifted his massive head and looked at her with golden eyes. He said, "Wow?" which always made Leah laugh.

She laughed now. Then she fell across the bed and ran her hand over the cat's smooth, glossy fur. "You're all right, Cap'n Brown!" she said. He seemed to be wearing a black-and-white suit with the white of his neck forming a white cravat. He had been placed in the barn to catch rats and mice, but Leah had taken him into the house and for some reason

had decided to call him Cap'n Brown. She picked up the cat, and he purred as she stroked his ebony fur, lifting his head to be tickled under his chin. "I know what you want," she said. "You want to be brushed."

"Wow," Cap'n Brown said, and Leah again laughed. She found his brush and began giving him long, easy strokes. Cap'n Brown arched his back with pleasure as the brush traveled down his lanky body.

"I wish my hair were as easy to fix as yours," she said, reaching up to touch her blonde locks. She had washed her hair with rainwater just that morning, and it was still slightly damp, the ends of it curling. She realized that she had to do something with it.

"I can't be brushing you all the time, Cap'n Brown." She tossed him off her lap.

He landed lightly on the bed, stared at her, then yawned and curled up and immediately went to sleep.

With a sigh, Leah went back to the wardrobe and chose the only dress that would do at all for the party. It was one she had made only four weeks earlier, so she knew the fit was right. The trouble was that it was not intended to be a party dress.

She held it up to the light. "It's just a plain, old brown dress," she said, "but it's either that or wear overalls." Quickly she slipped it on, looking longingly again at the royal blue dress that was so pretty.

She sat down then at the little desk beside her spool bed and pulled a small book toward her. This was the journal for which she had spent twenty-five Confederate dollars earlier in the year. If I were buying it now, she thought, it would cost fifty dol-

lars or seventy-five or perhaps even a hundred. Confederate money was practically worthless.

“I’m glad I bought it when I did,” she murmured, then dipped a quill into the glass inkwell and began to write. It was a pleasure to write in her journal, and she loved looking back and seeing what she had been thinking six months ago. Some of it made her laugh, and other writing embarrassed her for she was able to see her own foolishness.

The turkey quill scratched across the page as Leah wrote in tiny, ornate script, dipping the pen from time to time into the ink, which also was growing scarce. She stopped after a time and reread what she had written:

Am I a girl—or am I a woman? Just now I tried on the blue dress that fit me perfectly a year ago, but now I can’t even squeeze into it. I’m no taller than I was then, and I thank the Lord for that! I’m tall enough already at five feet seven, which is plenty. But I’ve filled out so that I’ve got to wear my brown dress, and it was never meant for a party. But I’m going to Lucy’s party, no matter what!

She sat at the desk, dreamily thinking of what her life had been like. Looking back through the journal, she saw entries about things that had taken place when she was at home with her family in Pineville. She read again, with pleasure, about bringing Jeff’s baby sister, Esther, to be with his family here in Richmond.

She read references to the Majors family and to Jeff himself, who had been her best friend all her life. They had the same birthday, and now Leah thought

of how Jeff, at eighteen, had changed from a lanky, wild-haired boy to a fine-looking man like his father, Col. Nelson Majors, and like his older brother, Tom.

The Majors family had moved South at the beginning of the Civil War. Then Colonel Majors's wife died, leaving the small child that she named Esther. And now the three Majors men were all in Richmond with the Confederate army.

Leah's lips curled upward as she thought of baby Esther, whom she had cared for and who had taken up so much of her life. Not a baby now, for she was three years old and talking more every day.

She thought also of the future. Colonel Majors and Eileen Fremont planned to be married soon, and Esther would have a new mother. Jeff, at first, had been opposed to his father's taking another wife. But he had come around and now seemed to love Eileen Fremont as much as he had disliked her before.

Leah began to write again:

I know that Lucy will have a beautiful dress, and she's so little and pretty that she makes me look even more gawky and bigger than I am. And Jeff, he's just like all the rest of the boys. Just dazzled by Lucy. What chance do I have? I'll have to wear a dress that isn't pretty, and I won't get to dance a single time with Jeff, and I'll just sit in a corner, and nobody will even notice me!

Slowly Leah leaned back, wiped the quill on a piece of cloth kept for that purpose, and put the brass cap on the ink bottle. She sprinkled a little fine, white sand over the writing to dry it, blew it off, and then read what she had written. Something

about it, she knew, was wrong, but she could not understand what. What she thought was, *I'm seventeen years old, and that's a woman—but sometimes I don't feel grown up. So what am I? A little girl or a woman?*

The Driscoll home was ornate, large, beautiful, and, Leah knew, filled with expensive paintings and decorations. As Jeff stopped the team in front of the big portico with its eight white columns, again she felt intimidated by it all. She watched as a tall slave came out and took the lines from Jeff.

The man flashed his white teeth. “Yes, suh, I will take care of this team. The party’s startin’. You better get on in!”

“Thanks.” Jeff got down and went around to Leah’s side and put up a hand.

She took it, noting that he looked very handsome indeed in his ash-gray Confederate uniform. He had begun the war as a drummer boy at Bull Run but now was a full-fledged private in the Stonewall Brigade. His black belt and boots and the red sash around his trim middle made him look very athletic. She glanced at his hair, the blackest she had ever seen, and thought again, *He’s the best-looking boy I’ve ever known.*

All the way to the Driscoll house, Jeff had talked about going back to duty. He still moved his left arm rather awkwardly, for he had been slightly wounded at the siege of Petersburg. General Grant, with thousands of Federal soldiers, was still drawn up in front of that city, and the Confederates were fighting in a desperate attempt to keep them from coming through and taking Richmond.

However, Jeff now seemed able to put this from his mind. His grin flashed, and he held Leah's hand for just a moment longer than necessary, leaning over to wink at her. "You're going to have a good time at this party," he promised. "Everybody will be here."

Leah smiled quickly. "I hope so, Jeff. Don't leave me all alone, now."

"Oh, you won't need me. There'll be plenty of fellas coming to ask you to dance. Let's go in."

Leah and Jeff entered the palatial mansion and moved down the hall toward the sound of music. When they stepped into the ballroom, she saw that the large room was filled with young people and decorations hung from the chandeliers and on the walls. Across one end stood a long table, draped with a white cloth and topped with gleaming china. Cut crystal glasses caught and reflected the light from the chandeliers.

The dancing had already started, for Lucy Driscoll would have nothing less for her birthday than a dance. The music was provided by a five-piece band, and the dresses of the young women looked like green, red, blue, and yellow lights as they moved about the room.

"This beats starving in the trenches at Petersburg," Jeff said. Then his eyes narrowed. "There's Lucy."

As Leah had guessed, the girl was wearing the most beautiful gown that money could buy. Lucy's dress was baby blue silk with a small, woven floral design. It had a square neckline, edged with a white lace frill. The lace-frilled sleeves were very short and puffed. The overskirt touched the floor and was looped up at the sides and held in place by large

white silk bows. It was worn over a large hoop. Her fair hair was coiled high on her head with long ringlets hanging down the back. She had on short, white silk gloves and a pearl choker.

“Let’s go wish her a happy birthday,” Jeff said.

Leah seized Jeff’s arm and clung to him. She had the impulse to turn and run, for she felt like a crow at a meeting of brilliantly colored bluejays and cardinals and canaries. Her brown dress, though serviceable enough for church, was totally out of place here. She wanted to cry.

I wish I’d never come, she thought and gritted her teeth. *As soon as I can, I’ll get away where nobody can see me.*

“Why, Jeff, how nice to see you—and you too, Leah.”

Lucy Driscoll was small and shapely and charming. Her hair was as blonde as Leah’s, but whereas Leah was tall and strong-looking, Lucy was diminutive and made the most of it.

“You look great, Lucy.” Jeff smiled, taking her hand. He bent over and kissed it, then laughed. “I been practicing up on that.”

“I bet it was with Leah here,” Lucy said archly. “Has he been practicing his charms on you, Leah?”

“No,” Leah said shortly, “he hasn’t!”

Jeff shifted uncomfortably. “To tell the truth, that was my first attempt. Anyway, I been practicing up on my dancin’, even though it was all by myself.” The music started up again just then, and he said, “Could I have this dance, Lucy?”

“Oh, I’m sorry. I already promised it to Cecil.”

A thin young man about Jeff’s age, who had been standing off to one side listening, stepped forward. He had chestnut hair and bright eyes and wore the

uniform of a first lieutenant. "Go ahead. I'll make the sacrifice for you, Jeff."

"Well, that's nice of you, Cecil—I mean, lieutenant. I keep forgetting you've been commissioned, sir."

"Oh, let's forget that," Cecil said, "at least while we're here." He seemed to be the only officer present among several young soldiers and many civilian boys not yet old enough to enlist. He turned to Leah. "May I have this dance, Leah?"

Glad to get away and feeling very warm toward the young man, Leah said, "Of course." She soon was sweeping around in a waltz with Cecil Taylor. He was not the best of dancers, but she liked him.

"Sorry about that," he said after a misstep. "I'm just never going to learn to be good at this."

Leah smiled at him. "You're doing fine."

Cecil was only an inch or two taller than Leah herself. She had grown fond of him on her first trip to Richmond. At that time he had proved to be a friend when Lucy had been somewhat less than friendly. His father was a wealthy planter. His mother was from one of the finest—that is to say, wealthiest—families of Virginia.

Leah glanced around the ballroom. "There aren't as many here as I thought there would be," she remarked.

"No, it's not like it used to be. I remember when fellows would come from all over the county for a party like this. But I guess a lot of 'em are in the army now. And besides, there just aren't enough horses to get us where we want to go." He looked down at her, interest in his friendly blue eyes. "I'm so glad you could come," he said. "I was afraid you might have gone back to Kentucky."

"I suppose I'll have to pretty soon. I came to bring Jeff's little sister here, but now that it looks like his father's going to remarry, they won't need me anymore as a nurse for her."

"That'll be a sorry day for me when you go back. As a matter of fact, I've missed you a lot."

"Will you be in the fighting soon?"

"I don't know. I've put in for it, but they keep me here as an aide in the War Department." Cecil sounded disgusted, and he missed another step, almost stumbling. "Sorry about that."

"What do you hear from your brother, Royal?" he asked after the music stopped and they were at the refreshment table. He was pouring her some lemonade from a tall pitcher.

Leah said, "He's in Chattanooga, but I don't think you'd want to hear about the doings of a Yankee soldier."

"If he's your brother, I would!" Cecil sipped his lemonade and made a face. "This doesn't have enough sugar in it. Here, let's sweeten it up with some of these cakes." He picked up some small white cakes coated with sugar and bit into one. "The Yankees whipped us pretty bad at Chattanooga, but I don't think they'll ever take Atlanta."

"I just wish it was over," Leah said, "and that we didn't have to hear about war all the time."

Across the ballroom, Jeff stood talking to Lucy. He was enjoying himself tremendously. He was also looking forward to having some of the refreshments, for food had gotten scarce in the Confederacy. Looking down at Lucy, he said, "That's the prettiest dress I've ever seen, I think. You sure look nice."

"Why, thank you, Jeff."

"I haven't seen you wear that one before."

"No, it came in on a privateer last month. Daddy bought it for me. Had to pay too much for it, I think."

"It was worth it." He led her toward the refreshment table. "Sure wish there wasn't anything to do but go to parties, and drink lemonade, and eat cake. Sure beats soldiering."

"Leah looks nice," Lucy said idly.

"What? Oh, yes, she does."

"She's so tall, though. I hope she doesn't grow any taller."

"I don't know. She looks pretty healthy."

"Oh, yes, she's healthy all right. Look, she and Cecil are trying to dance again. Cecil isn't much on a dance floor, I'm afraid."

Jeff glanced over as Cecil almost tripped over Leah's long skirt.

Lucy said, "Well, I hope he doesn't fall down and drag Leah with him. That would humiliate her, wouldn't it . . ."

"This is too much to ask a lady to put up with," Cecil said.

Leah was somewhat embarrassed, but she said, "No, you're not going to get any better if you don't practice."

The evening went on and on, and Lucy and Jeff—it seemed to Leah—danced almost every dance together. She herself kept going back to Cecil, who stood much of the time against the wall. "Come along, Cecil," she would say, taking his hand.

The more she saw Jeff laughing down at Lucy Driscoll, the more unhappy she became. *If I can't*

have the prettiest dress, I'll have to do something else to get Jeff's attention, she thought.

Leah was not a scheming girl. But having come to the party in such poor style, and then seeing Jeff so taken with Lucy Driscoll, she decided that she had to do something. She toyed with an idea. *If he's going to pay all that much attention to Lucy, then I'm going to make him jealous. I'll make him jealous of Cecil.*

The thought pleased her, and she moved closer to Cecil, saying, "You do look nice in your uniform, Cecil. I think officers of the Confederacy are so dashing, and I'm sure you're going to be a perfect hero when you get your chance."

Leah had never paid such attention to Cecil before, and he seemed dazzled by her compliments. "Why, Leah, I didn't know you felt like that!"

"Oh, I do! Now, let's try again. One, two, three. One, two, three. That's it! You're going to be the best dancer when I get through with you, Cecil Taylor."

Leah hardly saw the pleased look that came into Cecil's eyes. She looked across the room at Jeff and Lucy, thinking, *I'll make him so jealous, he won't even see Lucy Driscoll.*

2

Friends Fall Out

Sgt. Royal Carter entered the tent and found Pvt. A. B. Rose lying limply on his cot.

“What’s the matter with you, Rosie?” Royal said. “You’re not ready for breakfast?”

For a moment the gangling soldier stretched out on the cot said nothing. Then he looked past his big feet to reveal a pair of light blue eyes. His tow-colored hair was badly awry. He managed to say mournfully, “Well, sergeant, I reckon my time has come.”

“The time’s come for breakfast!”

Rosie shook his head. “Nope, it’s all up with me this time, Royal. I don’t hold out much hope that I can make it anymore.”

“What’s wrong with you?” Royal stood over him. “You look all right to me.”

“Well, looks are plumb deceivin’. You ought to know that. I might look good, but I ain’t good inside. No, sir, not a bit of it!”

A slight smile curled the corners of Royal Carter’s lips. He mused over the limp figure of the tall private a moment more. “Well,” he said, “if you feel so bad, I guess I’d better go and eat those pancakes and ham that the cooks made for us this morning.”

As Royal had anticipated, the mention of pancakes seemed to bring fresh strength into Rosie. He sat up at once, cleared his throat, and ran his hands through his hair. “Well, now, Professor—maybe if you’ll help me, I can make it to the mess hall. Then

if I get one of those pancakes down me, I might feel better.”

“Just lean on me, Rosie,” Royal said soothingly. Hiding a grin, he pretended to sag as the huge private put an arm over his shoulder and the two started for the eating area.

Royal, at twenty-two, was not more than five feet nine but was sturdy and strong. He had light hair and blue eyes and was known as Professor by his fellow soldiers primarily because he had some college education. He also was rarely seen without a book.

The mess hall was a large frame building that had once been a factory but had been seized by the Federal army when it took Chattanooga. It had been turned into a fine kitchen and mess hall combined.

“Come on, now! You’re going to make it! Just up these steps.”

Hanging on loosely and shuffling his feet, Rosie said, “I made my will out last night.”

“Again? That’s the tenth will you’ve made that I know of! I wish I was as sure of living as you are, Rosie. You’re healthy as a horse.”

Rosie’s craggy features looked pained. “Nobody understands me,” he said. “I’m a sick man.”

Actually there was no healthier soldier in the Union army than Pvt. A. B. Rose. He was indeed healthy as a horse and as strong as one as well. But he fancied himself sick and repeatedly went to the surgeon of the regiment, trying to explain his ailments. He had an enormous collection of patent medicines, including pills, syrups, and concoctions of all sorts, to which he added some that he himself had invented. His friends warned him that he was

going to kill himself with some of these medicines, but Rosie gloomily persisted.

The two soldiers went into the mess hall, and Royal called out, "Make room, men! Let's help poor old Rosie try to hold something down."

A yell went up from the soldiers, who were putting away pancakes at a prodigious rate.

Walter Beddows, a short, stocky boy with brown hair and brown eyes, laughed aloud. "Sit down here by me, Rosie. I'll hold you up while Sergeant Pickens stuffs a few pancakes down your throat."

Another private said, "Here, I'll even pour the syrup on 'em. We got fresh-made sorghum."

Rosie sat and looked across the table at Walter and Ira Pickens, a tall, lean sergeant with brown eyes and bushy black hair, who grinned at him.

"I think he's gonna die this time, Ira," Walter said.

"No, just get some of these pancakes down him. They'd make a corpse come to life."

A great deal of wry humor passed back and forth as Rosie slowly forked a pancake onto his plate. He drowned it in syrup, cut it in two, and stuffed half of it into his mouth. Then he annihilated the second half. His eyes brightened. "That's better, fellas. Let me have a few more of those."

Royal watched and winked at his fellow sergeant, Ira Pickens, as Rosie helped himself to a half dozen large pancakes and attacked them.

"I suppose you're going to live, aren't you, Rosie?" Ira asked finally.

"I reckon I will. If I just had some coffee and a piece of that ham to come out even."

Rosie looked up as another private entered. The newcomer was tall, strong-looking, athletic. He had

crisp brown hair, gray eyes, and his uniform was spotless. "Well, Drake, I think I'm going to make it. These pancakes, I believe, have got some kind of therapeutic value."

Drake Bedford took a seat and lifted his eyebrows at Rosie. They had joined up together and were the best of friends. "You didn't leave any pancakes for me?" he exclaimed. "What a pig!"

"Here," Royal said, "I saved three of them back for you."

"Hey, thanks a lot, sergeant." Drake grinned. "I'll do the same for you sometime."

As Drake began eating his pancakes, talk went around the table about the battle that they had just been through.

"We sure whipped them Rebs this time!" somebody said. "I reckon the Army of Tennessee is running yet after we charged 'em up Missionary Ridge."

Loud cries of agreement sounded, and Walter Beddows said, "You're right about that. Furthermore, I think we're gonna run 'em all the way back to Atlanta."

"It's about time we won a battle," Sergeant Pickens put in. He was a homely young man, a good friend of Leah Carter, and somewhat struck with her. He winked at Royal. "I got me a letter from your sister Leah."

Royal grinned. "Are you still tryin' to court her? I told you—she's dotty about Jeff Majors."

"He's just an old Confederate," Ira drawled. "Just let me get close to her again, and I'll show you what courtin' really is."

Some catcalls went up at this.

And then Walter Beddows winked at Rosie and said, "Hey, Drake, how you doin' with *your* courtin'?"

Drake had been eating steadily, but at Walter's remark his face assumed a frown. "I'm doin' all right," he said.

"Is that right?" Walter continued. He loved to tease. "Why, I heard our sergeant has the inside track on that little ol' Lori Jenkins."

"Cut it out, will you, Walter!" Royal said. He and Drake were competing for Lori Jenkins's hand, and he knew that Drake hated to be teased.

But Walter never knew when to stop, and he kept up his teasing until finally Drake said, "Bed-dows, shut up, or I'll clean your plow!"

"Oh, he didn't mean anything," Royal said quickly. He hated to see dissension among his squad and shot a warning frown at Walter.

Drake, however, was extrasensitive. He got up and walked stiffly out of the mess hall.

"Hey, you left your pancakes!" Rosie called after him. "Do you mind if I have 'em?"

Drake went out, slamming the door.

"Whooie, he sure is powerful touchy, isn't he, Professor?" Walter said.

"Too touchy—and you fellows lay off of him! You hear me? Especially you, Walter. You never know when to quit."

Rosie commandeered the remains of Drake's breakfast and consumed them with relish. "You're right about that, Professor. I've known Drake a long time. If he didn't have such a hot temper, he'd live longer. I been tellin' him he ought to take some of my liver pills." He swallowed the last bite and sighed with satisfaction. "Come to think of it, I better take some myself." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a huge bottle. He removed the top and shook out a handful of pills. "You fellows want

some?" he asked. Getting no takers, he took two and swallowed them easily without water. "Now," he said, "that ought to calm my innards down a little bit."

"They better be calm because we're gonna be headin' out of here any time," Royal said.

"General Sherman tell you that?" Pickens asked with a grin.

"Everybody knows about it. We'll be headin' for Atlanta, and there'll be plenty of fightin' along the way."

After the Confederates retreated from Chattanooga, General Sherman at once gave orders to follow them. He had three armies, 110,000 men strong; Gen. Joe E. Johnston's Army of Tennessee had fewer than 65,000. The Union troops packed up and started out toward Atlanta.

During the march, Rosie asked, "What do you think about our strategy, Royal? How are we goin' to whip them Rebs?"

The others listened avidly, for Royal was the only man in the squad who paid much attention to strategy.

"Well," he said, "we've got to do two things. First, we've got to whip Johnston's army. And the second thing is, we've got to capture Atlanta."

"Why do we need Atlanta?" Drake muttered sourly.

Royal pretended not to notice Drake's sullen looks. He knew Drake did not like soldiering. "Next to Richmond," he said, "Atlanta is the most important manufacturing city in the South. If we can capture that, that'll reduce their ability to wage war. They won't have anything left to fight with."

“What do you think the Confederates are going to do?” Walter Beddows asked.

“First they’re going to try and whip us. But being so outnumbered, I don’t think they can handle that,” Royal said. “I think they’ll retreat and try to trick us into some ground where they’ll have more of a chance. And, of course, secondly, they’ll hole up and defend Atlanta. But you know what they’re really tryin’ to do is stall for time.”

“Why they doin’ that?” Rosie inquired.

“Because, if the war keeps on going on, some of our folks back home might decide it costs too much. And if President Lincoln gets defeated next November, the war might just be stopped. So if they can just hold out, they’ve got a good chance of winning that way.”

The others listened, but Royal knew they actually paid little attention to theories.

However, they soon paid attention to the action. When the Federals arrived at a place called Resaca, they made an attack, and there was intense fighting. After this, they pursued the Rebels until they fought again. Johnston and his Confederate forces were waiting for them at Newhope Church, and hard battles were fought there.

Royal and his squad were sent on a wide, ranging sweep and, after a series of operations, found themselves in front of Kennesaw Mountain. The Northern army had come three-fourths of the way to Atlanta, and so far there had been only isolated pitched battles. But this time Sherman loosed the entire Federal force on Confederate positions.

Sherman’s troops took considerable mauling, and the general, fighter that he was, decided that Atlanta could not be taken by a frontal assault. The Union

forces then moved along the Chattahoochee River, and the Confederates eventually retired across the river to a strong position just north of Atlanta.

During all of the battles, Drake had fought with courage. He was a man who could endure almost anything except inactivity. He was a social being, loved parties, played the fiddle well, had a good singing voice, and had been very popular in civilian life. Now, once the armies were not fighting but simply waiting it out, he became restless.

Royal was careful how he spoke to Drake. He considered the man a friend even though the two of them were in fierce competition for Lori Jenkins. But being a responsible sergeant, finally he could overlook Drake's malingering and laziness no longer. Approaching him one morning as Drake lay outside his tent while the other men were working, he said, "Drake, up and at it! Help the other fellas!"

Drake, unfortunately, had found some liquor the night before and had gotten drunk. He probably had a terrible headache, for he flinched at the impact of Royal's voice. Without opening his eyes he said, "You don't need me, Royal!"

Even as he spoke, an officer walked by, Lt. Harvey Logan, a hard man on any private who spoke back to his officer or noncom.

Alarmed, Royal said, "Come on, Drake, get with it!"

Drake, again without opening his eyes, cursed Royal and told him, "Get away and leave me alone!"

"On your feet, private!"

At the rough voice of the lieutenant, Drake did open his eyes, and when he saw the anger on Logan's face, he scrambled to his feet.

"If you don't like to work, I'll give you something better to do."

"I think I can discipline him, lieutenant," Royal said hastily. "If you don't mind, sir."

"I do mind!" the lieutenant said. "He's been getting away with murder! Let him ride the horse. See if he likes that. After a few hours, he'll be glad to go to work."

The rest of the squad stood listening to all this, and some of them looked pleased. Royal knew they resented having to do Drake's work.

"Get him on that horse!"

Royal had no choice. "Come on, Private Bedford."

Drake had gone too far, but he was a proud young man and would never beg. When he got to the wooden "horse," which was a rough pole six inches across and suspended six feet in the air by crossed legs, he turned a little pale. Men had been kept straddled on this apparatus until they cried for mercy.

"On that pole, Bedford," Lieutenant Logan ordered.

Drake leaped up and straddled the pole. He held on with his hands in front of him and waited.

"Tie his feet under there!" Lieutenant Logan said, and with regret Royal obeyed the order.

"How long do I have to stay up here, sir?"

"I'll tell you when you can get down! You can think about what a sorry soldier you are while you're up there!" Lieutenant Logan gave Royal a hard glance. "You leave him there, sergeant, until I tell you to take him down."

"Yes, sir!"

For the next six hours, Drake sat on the horse.

What was at first uncomfortable became literal torture after a while. He tried to shift his position, raising himself off the pole from time to time. But that was impossible for long.

Even worse than the torture were the snickers and laughter of the men of A Company who came by. "Ride 'em, cowboy!" they would yell. "You got him, Drake! Just ride him all the way back to Washington!" Such gibes infuriated him, but he could not do anything about it.

The lieutenant came by at dusk. "All right, sergeant, cut him loose."

Royal slit the thongs binding Drake's feet and said, "Let me help you down, Drake."

"Get away from me!" Drake slipped off the pole, clinging to it to keep from falling until the circulation came back to his legs. Then he staggered off, his face set in an air of resentment.

"He sure doesn't learn very good, does he, Professor?" Jay Walters remarked.

"He sure don't!" Rosie put in. "He's always shoot-in' himself in the foot. Sure wish he would learn to be nice and easygoing. Maybe some of this new syrup I made out of hemlock will help him."

Jay shook his head. "I don't think any medicine is gonna help him. Just a change of heart."

"He needs that all right. He's a right good feller. He's just got too much temper for one man."