

Gettysburg Battle Day 2

2 July 1863

Gettysburg

Maggie rose at sunup, quickly washed and dressed and went downstairs to start breakfast. She rubbed her eyes. How many did they have for this morning? There were ten wounded men, five men on the porch, and Captain Morrison in the upstairs annex – and how many? – eight? – hidden in the cellar. And Lydia, Emily and herself.

Maggie sighed tiredly and went to work making the bread. She doubled the recipe, hoping it would be enough. *We shall be baking all day*, she thought, *and in this weather*. Already it was hot outside and the sun was barely up.

She knew Emily would be down soon but wanted to get everything ready. First on the list was to gather some eggs. As she came out the back door, she was shocked to see two men in butternut reaching into the hen house. “Gentlemen,” she barked. “Those are not your eggs!”

“We’re hungry, ma’am.”

She frowned. “Well, if you’re hungry go sit on my front porch and I’ll bring you breakfast.”

“Much obliged, ma’am.”

“You needed only to ask. There is no need to steal from us.”

As they walked out the back gate and around to the front of the house, Maggie scratched her head. How many more, then? Nearly thirty!

“I might just start a restaurant,” she muttered and proceeded to gather the eggs. Four loaves of bread simply would not do. They would have to make dozens of biscuits, fry up bacon and potatoes, and get as much milk as they could out of the cow. It made her head swim.

Suddenly she heard something stir in the barn – and it didn’t sound like the cow. Maggie put the egg basket on the ground, walked cautiously to the barn and looked inside. There, in an empty stall, she saw a huddled figure. It appeared to be shivering. “Hello?”

The figure’s head shot up. “Sorry, ma’am. I – I think I need help.”

She went to the young man’s side and felt of his head. “You have a fever!”

“Got a bullet in my leg, too.” His voice sounded familiar.

“Come with me.” She helped him to his feet. As they came into the morning light, she saw his face and gasped. “Gideon Opdyke?”

It took him a moment to focus on her. “Mrs. Smith?”

“Oh, my goodness. Why are you hiding? Why did you not just come for help?”

His lower lip trembled. “I want to quit. I’ve had enough. Lemuel’s all right with this. I think he likes killing. But I hate it. Hate the noise, hate the guns, hate it all. I just want to go home.”

“I understand. Please come inside. I’ll have Lydia examine your wound. We’ll work out the rest of your problem later.”

As they approached the back stoop, Gideon said, “I’m sorry about your house, Mrs. Smith. Lem always pushed me around. I never believed that claptrap he holds so dear, all that stuff about slavery being good and colored people being stupid and hateful.”

“I bear you no ill will, my dear,” Maggie soothed. “Now, hush, you’ll use up your strength.”

She could not hate him because he was a poor wounded boy with a fever. But his words confused her and called up questions: If he had disagreed with his brother all along, then why hadn't he stood up to Lemuel? Maggie couldn't fathom it. There were far too many questions, contradictions, and paradoxes crowding around her like a noisy, pushy mob. She angrily shoved them away and returned her focus to Gideon. He needed help. She could provide that help. And that was the end of that.

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Maggie's Journal, 2 July 1863

And so we are occupied by the Confederates. No one knows how to proceed or how to live in this environment. If we go into the streets when the fighting is going on, we risk being struck by stray minie balls or shells. And there are sharpshooters from both sides training their sights on movement along particular avenues. Stories are spreading about people who have narrowly escaped being shot as they tried to deliver food or water to the injured. And of course, we are under the scrutiny of the enemy, who could arrest us if they do not like the look of us. As for Emily, she like other women of color must remain hidden inside the house for fear of being taken captive.

Our street contains the disturbing debris of Union soldiers' belongings, left by our men as they retreated yesterday. Rebel soldiers have opened the backpacks and had a look at their contents, taking whatever they wanted or needed. Discarded personal items are strewn everywhere.

A dead horse is two houses up. The heat, I fear, will soon cause it to stink. Our town is rapidly becoming a hell on earth.

It is unbelievable that men fought hand-to-hand yesterday while we huddled in the cellar. Now there are puddles of blood here and there on the streets as reminders. A new dead body, one of our Union soldiers, lies some yards from our home. From my porch I could see that his shoes have been taken and his clothing disturbed by people searching for who knows what.

For the most part, our captors have been courteous. They seem determined to keep the virtue of Gettysburg women intact, which gives me some relief with regard to Frankie and Lydia. However, I sense that if I were to resist too vigorously a Confederate soldier's demands for food and shelter, he would not hesitate to use his power to persuade me otherwise. Their men are not above bullying and intimidation.

This morning some men arrived and began to knock down the fence around our house. I rushed outside and asked them why they were doing such a thing. They tipped their hats and politely explained that they needed the wood to build barricades across certain streets. So now we have no fences.

Later Lydia happened to look out the kitchen window just in time to see two Johnnies trying to walk off with our cow. She and I ran to confront them. We told them we needed the milk to strengthen the injured in our house. Would they take nourishment from the mouths of wounded men, we argued. They did not like our question but knew it was wrong to oppose us, so they handed Bossy over. Naturally, we did not want such a thing to happen again. Emily's quick thinking saved the day. We cleaned out the back parlor, laid down a bed of straw, and put Bossy in it, shutting the door for good measure.

A woman on the street told me the gas works have been shut down, which means we shall have no streetlights tonight and some homes shall have no lights at

all. We are fortunate the Millhouse family did not approve of such a modern convenience as gas. Thus, our lanterns and candles shall give us light.

It is difficult keeping the men in the secret cellar concealed. We work hard to sneak food and water to them when we can and to empty their privy buckets when at all possible, but that is not always possible, and the cellar is becoming quite aromatic.

As I write this we are sitting in the other cellar as shells are lobbed back and forth across the town. The noise is deafening. At times, the house vibrates. The men who could walk have joined us, but those who cannot were forced to remain upstairs. We shifted many from the beds onto the floor for fear they might be wounded by a bullet flying through a window. We pray no shell may find our house, for then there would be no hope for our bedridden patients.

Lydia has treated young Gideon Opdyke. She removed a ball from his leg. It was not a bad wound but was beginning to fester, so it needed to come out right away. Unfortunately, we must ration ether, saving it for extreme cases such as amputation. One of the Confederate soldiers had made us a present of a bottle of whiskey, so we gave some to Gideon and I held his hand as Lydia dug the bullet out. The poor boy tried not to cry, but he could not help it. He now is resting. Lydia put a mustard poultice on the wound to draw out infection, and I had been putting cool damp cloths on his feverish brow until the cannonading began.

While we initially had Union men in our home, we are finding that the Confederate wounded are growing. This has confused my feelings greatly. All the men are starting to seem the same to me. I used to be so certain that the war was necessary to free the slaves. I still believe the slaves must be freed, for our Declaration of Independence says all men are created equal. I have learned that people with dark skin are those who merely happen to have dark skin, nothing more and nothing less. They are created by God and as such are God's beloved children just as surely as white people are also God's beloved children. But now...these demons I feared, these Confederates, these monsters from the South also are changing into children of God right before my eyes. When I previously thought of them, my heart would thump terribly and my head would spin, but not so now. I see they bleed the same color and in the same way as our men. I hear them cry and moan and plead just as our men do. I hear them tell of their girls or wives and children, their mothers, sisters, fathers, and brothers. They speak of going to church and of praying. And they die, Journal, just as our men die.

I must stop writing now, for the bombardment has eased up. Emily and I shall return to baking bread and biscuits. Oh, how I crave a rest. I feel so very tired. I pray there will be time for that later.

[South of Culp's Farm, Frankie is staying with Gus Schultz's aunt Beate. She learns that there is a field hospital being set up at the Spangler farm and decides to go there and help.]

[In Taneytown, Maryland, the 6th Corps pauses for rest. It is here that Patrick comes to Eli and Carson with the news that they're headed toward a big battle located in Gettysburg.]

It was early in the afternoon. Lydia had just removed a soldier's arm above the elbow. Maggie stood at the boy's head ready to add drops of ether to a cloth which she then would place over his face. She was getting used to the sight and smell of blood and gore. She had learned to be careful with the ether. If its fumes got too close to the lamp, they all could all go up in flames. The notion sent chills up her spine and she vigilantly withstood the temptation to engage in wool-gathering.

Lydia moved quickly to reposition so she could suture the wound. She frowned as she pulled her skirt free from the bloody arm on the floor. She hissed between her teeth and said to Emily, "Needle, please."

Emily reached into the tray she held and passed the threaded suture needle to the younger woman.

"I simply cannot operate comfortably in a dress," Lydia grumbled. "My skirt and petticoats insist on wrapping about my limbs and get entangled with the table and other matter."

"What do you think you should do?" Maggie asked.

Lydia glanced up to evaluate her patient. "He seems to be coming around. Give him a few more drops, please, Mama."

Maggie did so and the patient fell deeper asleep.

"I would like," her daughter said, picking up where they had left off, "to put on trousers."

Both Maggie and Emily gaped at her. Maggie spoke first. "Trousers, you say?"

"This is no time for propriety, Mama. I need to work, and I simply cannot do it in skirts and petticoats." She lifted her chin. "I shall put on some of Edgar's old clothes."

"Do what you must. But your hips are too wide for Edgar's things. We have some of Eli's clothing upstairs."

Emily added, "Yes. We can alter a pair of his trousers."

So after the surgery, Lydia and Maggie went upstairs and re-fitted Eli's trousers to her figure. Once Lydia had on the pants and a shirt, she turned so her mother could check the fit. Maggie raised her eyebrows, for her daughter had a round, shapely bottom. She cleared her throat. "Well, if anything our men will be exceedingly glad to see you going."

"What?" Lydia looked around, trying to see her behind. "Is it very bad?"

"It is quite revealing, Liddy."

To her surprise, her daughter shrugged. "Oh, well, they'll just have to put up with it."

Her determination made Maggie laugh. "I'm sure they not only will put up with it but will demand it, should you try to return to wearing skirts. In the meantime, you'll scandalize everyone else."

Lydia struck a defiant pose. "Oh, hang everyone else! I've got work to do!"

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By 4:00 p.m., the heavy artillery fire had resumed as Lee began his attempt to squeeze the Union from two sides. Maggie, Lydia, and Emily made sure their charges were as safe as possibly before they retreated to the cellar. Downstairs, they covered their ears when the booming became too loud and flinched when shells screeched overhead. Suddenly one particularly loud bang shook their building to its foundations.

"Oh, Lord, it struck our house!" Emily gasped.

"Nope," said a Confederate soldier, who had been caught in the bombardment and was temporarily sheltering with them. "Ain't your house. But I reckon it weren't too far away. Maybe your barn."

Maggie hugged herself and wondered where Eli was at this moment. Then she wondered about Frankie. *Lord, keep them safe*, she prayed although she was not sure God could hear above all the racket they were making on earth.

"You all right?" Emily asked.

"I'm fine."

"You're holding your belly. You don't have pains, do you?"

"No. In fact, it's just the opposite. The baby is moving."

"Think all the noise is bothering it?"

"I am sure it can hear because it responds when I speak to it." Maggie kept her arms protectively over her abdomen. "It must be frightened. What can I do to calm it?"

Emily patted her knee. "Well, for one, *you* can relax, little mother."

Maggie wondered: *How can I do that? Something hit our barn, there is artillery fire everywhere, and we are hosting the enemy.* But she said, "I shall try." She took a deep breath and attempted to quiet her fear.

The cellar doors leading to the backyard suddenly flew open and five more Confederate soldiers pounded down the steps. The last one in pulled the doors shut with a thud. For an awkward moment, there were stares all around. Finally, Maggie said, "Good afternoon, gentlemen. I am Mrs. Smith, and this is my servant, Mrs. Johnson. You are welcome to stay here as long as you wish."

One man removed his filthy, ragged kepi. "Thank you, ma'am. Much obliged." And they all plopped down on the dirt floor.

Maggie spoke over the cannonading, "Do you have any idea how long this will go on?"

"Not much longer, I should think," another of the newcomers answered.

"Can you tell us if our barn is still there?" Emily asked.

A third man spat tobacco juice onto the dirt floor. "Half gone, I reckon. Looks like a shell got it."

Maggie and Emily exchanged glances as both thought the same thing: *thank God the cow is in the back parlor.*

"I would like to know where the armies are," Maggie said. "I cannot tell which bombardment comes from whom."

The men considered this. Then the one who had removed his kepi shrugged. These women were trapped in their cellar. A little conversation wouldn't hurt anything. Who would they tell? "Well, from what I understand, we all are to the north and west of the town."

The tobacco-spitter added, "Course, we're also in the town."

"I noticed that," Maggie said.

"Your army seems to be direct south and east." A barrage of artillery abruptly sounded southeast of the town.

The fourth man perked up. "There! Hear that? That comes from your fellas."

It was answered by fire from the southwest.

"And that's our army."

"Oh." Maggie flinched as an explosion sounded somewhere nearby.

A soldier who been in the cellar all along smiled apologetically. "Sorry, ma'am. That one was ours. But we don't aim to hit your town."

"Clearly you don't aim," was Maggie's reply.

[The 6th Corps arrives in Gettysburg late that afternoon, Eli is predictably worries about Maggie and the other members of the family. At Spangler's Farm field hospital, Frankie has an epiphany while caring for a Confederate soldier.]

Things quieted down around sunset. Maggie and Emily were able to leave the cellar to start preparing the evening meal. Their supply of food was getting scarce. They had regularly been chasing men away from the garden or the chickens or inviting them to supper. What else could they do? The soldiers obviously were hungry, so the two women made bread until the yeast ran out and now were baking biscuits round the clock.

Before darkness closed in, though, cannonading arose southeast of town. It was nearby – only a mile from the center of Gettysburg. The clamor was horrendous, and the impact of the shells caused the house to rattle and shake. Emily looked up from pressing a glass into dough to form biscuits. She gave Maggie a shake of the head. Maggie knew what that meant. They had no time to take cover. The wounded needed nourishment.

That evening amid the continuing din of the battle Maggie held a lamp so Lydia could see as she removed a man's foot. This time, Emily was the one keeping watch as she administered the ether. Maggie wondered at it all. Were there so many wounded that even a group of women had to remove bullets and limbs? Is what war was? Ordinary people called to do humane things in the midst of inhumane conditions? Exhausted, she lifted a prayer for Lydia, and for Emily, and for the C.S.A. soldier on the table.

By ten o'clock the worst of the fighting was over, with the exception of scattered picket fire. Whatever had happened on the battlefields that day was finished. Tomorrow they would start anew. As Maggie fell asleep on the floor of her bedroom – for fear a stray bullet would take her in the bed – she tried not to dread the morning. She just wanted to sleep.

[Later during the night, an intruder threatens Maggie and Emily, and the two are forced to fight – with Emily taking uncharacteristic action. Sorry... no spoilers.]