

A SHELTER IN THE STORM

by Carrie Turansky



To my husband, Scott, who
encouraged me to follow my dreams and has
helped me live them out for thirty-one years.
Happy anniversary and all my love!

*“Then the Lord will create. . .a shelter
and shade from the heat of the day,
and a refuge and hiding place from the storm.”*

ISAIAH 4:5-6 NIV

Chapter 1

October 1864

Springside Plantation, outside of Nashville, Tennessee



A gust of wind rattled the shutters over the parlor windows. The lantern flame flickered, sending shadows dancing across the walls. Rachel Thornton's hand stilled, and she looked up from her sewing.

Her younger sister, Susan, stopped reading aloud mid-sentence and glanced at her, questions shimmering in her blue eyes.

A shiver raced up Rachel's back, but she forced a smile for her sister's sake. "It's just the wind, dear. Go on."

Susan nodded, though uneasy lines creased the area between her slender brows. She tilted the Bible toward the lantern light. "Thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy—"

A shot exploded outside. Rachel gasped and pricked her

finger. A shout and second shot followed.

Susan dropped the Bible and spun toward the windows. “Do you think that’s Father?”

“I don’t know. Stay here.” Rachel strode into the wide entrance hall.

Her sister ignored her words and hurried after her. “Maybe it’s Colonel Hadley and his men on patrol.”

Rachel’s mind raced with possibilities. It could be the colonel. Union troops occupied the Nashville area and often called on their family, but they rarely came to Springside this late at night unless they needed medical help from her father.

“Do you think they’re chasing a deserter or a Confederate spy?” Excitement overshadowed any fear in fifteen-year-old Susan’s voice.

A more alarming question rose in Rachel’s mind. Had Father been attacked on his way home by one of the bushwhackers who lurked along the roadside, robbing travelers and stealing their horses?

She hurried to her father’s library, jerked open the desk drawer, and pulled out his revolver.

Susan gasped. “What are you doing?”

Rachel opened the chamber, checking to be sure that all six bullets were in place. Her father had taught her how to fire it, though she’d never shot anything but a homemade target in the pasture beyond the stable.

She swallowed and tried to steady her voice. “I’m going to make sure everything’s all right.” If she hadn’t been so frightened, she would have laughed at those words. Nothing had been *all right* for more than three years, ever since this terrible

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war had broken out.

Gripping the revolver, she returned to the entrance hall and approached the front door. She would not stand by and let someone hurt her family or destroy their home. Not after all they had endured.

Susan ran after her. "You can't go outside."

"I have to. What if Father's been shot and needs our help?"

Panic filled her sister's eyes, and her chin trembled.

Rachel laid her hand on Susan's arm. "Don't cry. I'm sure it's just—"

A solid thump and low moan sounded beyond the front door.

The sisters froze, their eyes locked on each other. Rachel swallowed and grasped the revolver with both hands.

A loud pounding rattled the door. "Miz Rachel? Open up. It's Amos."

Relief melted through her. She lowered the gun, though she had no idea why Amos didn't go around back and let himself in with his key. She laid the revolver on the side table and hurried to the door. Susan stayed behind her as she turned the heavy lock.

Dim light from a lantern on the table shone past them to the tall figure on the portico. Amos stepped forward carrying a lifeless man in his arms.

"Who is it, Amos?"

"I don't know, Miz Rachel. I ran out front when I heard the shots. I found him layin' in the road by the gatepost."

Susan leaned around Rachel. "Is he dead?"

“Not yet, but he’s gonna be if we don’t do something to stop the bleedin’ in his arm.”

Rachel surveyed the man’s pale face and bloodstained jacket. Weary lines etched his forehead and the area around his closed eyes. A scraggly blond beard and mustache covered the lower half of his face, making it difficult to tell his age, though he looked young rather than old. His tattered clothes gave no clue to his identity. Was he a rebel on the run or a Union man?

Saint or sinner, she couldn’t banish him to the stable. “Bring him inside.”

“But what if he’s a bushwhacker or a thief?” Susan asked.

“We’ll worry about that later. Right now he needs our help.”

“But what will Father—”

“I’m sure he would agree. Now, go get some towels and a basin. And find Esther. I’ll need her help.”

Susan stood her ground. Rachel met her sister’s gaze with a firm, steady look. Finally, Susan huffed and flounced off toward the kitchen.

Rachel turned to Amos. “Take him up to the front bedroom.”

Amos hesitated, his dark eyes regarding her cautiously. “You sure about that, Miz Rachel?”

“Yes.” She motioned to the large, curving staircase at the back of the entry hall. “Put him in Nathan’s room.”

“I don’t know what your daddy gonna say about you bringing this man inside when he’s gone.” Amos grunted as he shifted the man’s weight. Then he headed toward the stairs.

Rachel bit her lip, debating her decision. Father might not

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return from town for several hours. She would have to treat the man herself. Her palms grew moist at that thought. All she knew she'd learned at her father's side as they attended wounded soldiers in makeshift hospitals in and around Nashville. Rebel or Union soldier, each man received the best care her father could give. She could do no less.

But did she have the skills she needed to save this man's life? That question weighed heavy upon her as she lifted the lantern and followed Amos up the stairs.

Rachel pressed her lips together and leaned closer to examine the man's wound. The bullet had passed straight through his upper left arm. With a gentle hand, she washed away the blood. "Bring the lantern closer."

Esther grimaced and turned her face away. "I don' know how you do that, Miz Rachel. Makes my head swim just takin' a peek."

Rachel held back a smile. Esther never had liked the sight of blood. "You don't have to watch. Just hold the lantern steady."

"All right. Long as you do the doctorin', I'll be fine."

Rachel certainly wasn't a doctor, though she had assisted her father for many years. This was the first time she'd treated such a serious injury on her own.

The man moaned and rolled his head toward Rachel.

Her stomach clenched, and she lifted her hand away. Of course she wanted him to wake up, but she'd hoped to clean and bandage his wound first. She had nothing to give him for the pain. What if he became delirious?

The man slowly opened his eyes and looked up at Rachel

with a dazed expression. His Adam's apple bobbed as he swallowed. He licked his lips and mumbled something she couldn't understand.

Rachel bent over him, bringing her face into the circle of light. "You've been injured, but we're taking good care of you."

Confusion filled his pain-glazed eyes. "Hettie?" He slowly lifted his hand and reached toward her face.

Rachel froze as his cool fingers skimmed her cheek. Then his hand fell to his side, and his blue eyes drifted closed again.

Esther clicked her tongue. "Oh, my. He thinks you're his sweetheart."

"Or his wife," Susan added with a delighted grin.

Rachel sent her sister a sharp look. But she couldn't silence the questions circling through her mind. Who was this man? And who was Hettie?

Footsteps sounded in the hallway. She looked up as her father opened the door. "Oh, Father, I'm so glad you're home." She wiped her hands and greeted him with a hug, thankful for the comfort of his strong arms around her.

He stepped back and looked at her with concern in his eyes. "Amos tells me you've taken in a patient."

She nodded. "He was attacked on the road by our gate."

"We heard two shots and men shouting." Susan came around the bed to greet Father. Though his focus was already on their patient, he leaned down and kissed Susan's forehead.

"He was bleeding badly when Amos found him. I had to bring him in."

He studied the man then gave her a quick nod. "Good decision. Let's take a look and see what we can do for him."

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Rachel released a breath. Everything would be all right now. She would assist Father, and together they would do all they could to be sure the man survived.

Father hung his jacket over the back of a nearby chair. Then he washed and dried his hands on a clean towel. He had always taught her that cleanliness was an important part of good medical practice. Others suggested his meticulous ways wasted time, but she believed he was right.

The man never stirred as Father checked the wounds then listened to his heart and lungs with a stethoscope. He asked for more light, then lifted the man's eyelids and leaned in for a closer look. Finally, he clasped the man's wrist and felt his pulse, his calm expression revealing nothing.

Rachel's stomach twisted like a butter churn. "How is he, Father?"

"Will he be all right?" Susan's serious tone suggested she'd finally realized the man's life hung in the balance, and this wasn't some silly adventure.

"His heartbeat is regular, and his lungs are clear." A shadow of uncertainty crossed Father's face. "But his pulse is weak, and it looks like it's been a long while since he's had a good meal." Father placed his hand on the man's forehead. "No fever. But his being unconscious this long concerns me. He may have hit his head when he fell or have internal injuries."

Rachel's throat tightened, and she pressed her lips together. She'd seen too many fine young men lose the battle against their injuries and pass from this life to the next, clutching tintypes of their sweethearts or letters from loved ones back home.

— A BLUE AND GRAY CHRISTMAS —

Please have mercy on him, Lord. We don't even know the poor man's name. Don't let him die.

“Let's bandage him up.”

Rachel nodded and passed Father several strips of clean cloth.

Lines furrowed his forehead as he wrapped the man's arm and then tied the bandages in a knot. “We'll have to watch him closely. The next few hours are very important.”

“I'll sit with him.” The words spilled from Rachel's mouth before she had time to think them through. “I mean. . .you must be tired, Father. Why don't you rest for a few hours and let me keep watch?”

Father straightened and met her gaze. “I suppose that's a good plan. But come and get me right away if he wakes up, or if you see any change in his condition.”

Rachel nodded, pulled the blanket up to the man's shoulders, and smoothed it over his chest. Her father and sister bid her goodnight and left the room.

“You want me to stay?” Esther asked. “I don't mind. That old Amos snores like a bear. I'd probably get more rest in here with you.”

Rachel smiled. “No, I'll be fine. You go on to bed.”

“Well, you keep that fire burnin' and bundle up. I don't want you catchin' your death o' cold. Then you be the one needin' nursin', and I don't even want to think about that.” Esther's mutters faded as she disappeared out the door.

Rachel leaned over the man and studied his pale face. Blue-gray half-circles shaded the area under his eyes. A smudge of dirt streaked one side of his forehead. An old scar

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under his left eye caught her attention. Had he been wounded while leading a line of troops into battle or from losing a bar-room brawl? She hoped it was the first scenario; but if he was a courageous officer, then where was his uniform? What if he was one of those dreadful bushwhackers who had plagued the countryside and made traveling so dangerous?

She looked at him again and shook her head. There might be more behind his trouble than a gunshot wound, but she didn't believe he was an outlaw or a deserter. At least she hoped he wasn't.

Closing her eyes, she whispered a prayer, "Lord, please spare this man's life."