

The Blue Hat and the Red Rose

By

Lynn Forest

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Published by Blushing Books®,

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ABCD Graphics and Design

977 Seminole Trail #233

Charlottesville, VA 22901

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Cover Design by ABCD Graphics

EBook ISBN: 978-1-68259-857-3

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Chapter One

Emily McMannus and her aunt and uncle sat nervously on the wooden stools in the fruit cellar beneath the stately home in Cynthiana, Kentucky. Most of the time during the three hours they took refuge in the cool and dark shelter, they kept their hands over their ears to try to block out the sounds of the artillery and gunshots. Emily and her aunt also kept their eyes squeezed shut most of the time, and when the ground would tremble, followed seconds later by the roar of an explosion, both of them would cry out.

The cellar was a place of refuge from shrapnel and gunshot. At the same time, the older people decided that it would be best that a young woman as attractive as Emily not be gazed upon by soldiers from either Army that may be less than stellar in their moral character.

Emily felt understandable fear, but she also felt much irritation and impatience. She could see no reason that people who spoke a common language, have lived in a nation founded in common by the states and who generally shared similar religious beliefs and basic principles would resort to violence against each other. She could see no reason why the leaders could not have simply reasoned out their differences without a single life being sacrificed and a single home destroyed.

They were aware that Union forces were counterattacking the Confederate troops who had recently driven a small force of the United States Army out of Cynthiana. Fortunately for the McMannuses, the fighting in neither battle had come closer than two streets away. And after hours of sitting by lantern light, the rumble of battle was finally growing more distant and subdued. Without saying a word, they all stood and went up the steps into the house, Emily leading the way.

They went out onto the front porch, looking around to see that there was still much smoke hanging in the air while Union riders went street by street shouting to the populace that the United States Army had retaken the town, and that all was clear and that they were safe to go about their business.

Hearing the news, Emily watched in silence as her uncle raised his fist and hand in triumph and shouted. His other hand rested on the handle of the cane that helped him walk in spite of the knee injury that kept him from serving in the Army himself, as much as he would have loved to have done so. And Emily watched as her sweet, but misguided (in her opinion, at least) aunt encouraged him by hugging him in their mutual happiness.

Emily was hardly at all unaware of the glum state of anxiety this part of her family had experienced in the short time that the Confederate troops had occupied Cynthiana. For the most part, life had gone on as usual, but her uncle and aunt were wary of the fact that they were known to be prominent and vocal Union supporters, and hoped that their dwelling would not be ransacked or they'd be subjected to any cruelty.

Emily stood by and watched the aunt and uncle that she so dearly loved as they enjoyed their revelry. She knew that they were feeling a great sense of relief, for when they had sent the letter in February inviting her to visit them in May; they never imagined that they would be inviting her to what would turn into an unexpected war zone. But now the battle was over, and the area was more or less secure. Emily was about to end her visit and go back to her Ohio home, but she was quite unhappy about the conditions under which she would travel.

On a warm June afternoon in 1864, Major Charles Morrow of the Army of the Republic, brushed dust off the shoulders and chest of his blue uniform as the town of Cynthiana slowly grew closer. As he neared the town of twelve hundred fatigued souls ready for peace, he could see the remaining signs of the bitter fighting that had taken place when three hundred soldiers loyal to the Union had been forced to surrender to the Confederate General John Hunt Morgan.

Later on, he encountered more debris and charred remains of buildings left behind when Union reinforcements from his own small cavalry unit joined with the Ohio Volunteer Infantry Division and had counterattacked. From that day on, Confederate raiders and local sympathizers of the Southern cause never again posed a significant threat to Cynthiana and the surrounding area.

He found it to be surreal, the contrast between the hours of battle and the state of the landscape he now viewed. There were still the smells and the burned remnants of buildings and things left behind. Those things were rather typical from one battle to another, battles that ran together in his memory that were so frequent and seemingly endless.

As always, the bodies were gone. There were no corpses in grotesque contortions and circling buzzards overhead racing with the burial details. But the images and the sounds seemed to hang around him like a fog.

In fact, his nights were often broken by the horrors and visions. And some days when he was fully awake, they would come out of nowhere, scenes that blocked out his conscious sight for a moment, taking him to some place he had been or someplace he feared he was yet to see.

Too many times he had surveyed the scene of a battle when all was quiet. At the beginning he would not see the distinction between bodies in blue and gray uniforms. Then finally he would concentrate his vision on the ones who wore his uniform, recognizing some of them as men he knew well, or those he knew not at all.

Not all of them who fell in the battles were young, as he knew that some were even grandfathers. But all in all, he knew that war came down to one powerful man telling another, "My young men can beat your young men."

Those that haunted him most were those who had died as a result of his own significant marksmanship with a revolver or rifle, or his lethal skill with the sword. And when he had been certain that he had killed someone, which happened during nearly every battle or skirmish he fought in, his thoughts that night were always the same.

He wondered if he had killed the father of young children, or even their grandfather. He knew that a large number of them had left behind a widow who did not yet know that she was widowed. And he knew that there were those who had taken part in the long kiss goodbye with a young woman to whom he had pledged he would return and marry.

The Major signaled for his horse to halt, and he took a moment to sit in silence and gaze around at the now quiet countryside just outside the small town. He would have preferred to have turned around and returned to the encampment where his Division was resting and tending to their wounds.

He really had no desire to continue on into the town and relive the sights, sounds and smells from his most recent day of combat. But he knew that he had no choice but to follow orders and complete his assignment, and he reminded himself that once his assignment was finished he could return to his next posting at Camp Harrison near Cincinnati, likely his last posting of the war. Although news did not travel quickly, he and his fellow Union soldiers knew that the Confederacy would likely come to an end as a meaningful military force within months.

The Major knew that his commanding General was aware of how badly he wanted to return to Ohio, and was aware of the fact that Major Charles Morrow had fought as bravely and hard as any officer or enlisted man under his command without so much as a single day of leisure in two years. In addition, the man's body bore the scars of two flesh wounds from musket balls, as well as a long slash across his left shoulder from the sword of a Rebel officer who died seconds later at the point of Morrow's own sword.

Now Charles Morrow could look forward to training new recruits at the Ohio fortress that had originally been constructed to defend Ohio and the rest of the North against Confederate invasion. But he knew that once he reached Camp Harrison, he would be able to rest from such things that tormented him. Now all that was between him and his new assignment were occasional bandits and the scattered remnants of the Confederate force that were known to be hiding out in the woods along the rivers and creeks of Northern Kentucky. All, that is, except for the special assignment that would result in his return to his home state.

While he was overwhelmingly appreciative of his assignment to Camp Harrison, he was equally perturbed that his manner of reaching the other side of the Ohio River would be on a buckboard while escorting a total stranger back to her parents near Cincinnati. The General had called him into his tent to explain that an Ohio Congressman had sent a special request through the chain of command on behalf of a neighbor. Their daughter had been spending the summer with an aunt and uncle in Cynthiana when the area had become an active battle zone. It would be up to him to get her safely back to her family, and protect her from some of those pro-Southern elements who were known to be preying upon local people known, or suspected to be, supporters of the Union.

The orders had even been put in writing by the General, telling him the name and address of the person being placed in his care and protection, as well as the address on the rural outskirts of Cincinnati to which she was to be transported without a hair being harmed on her head along the way. All that Charles Morrow had to do was keep her safe from Confederate partisans, renegade Southern troops and the assorted bandits operating in the region taking advantage of the virtual state of anarchy.

Morrow knew the streets of Cynthiana all too well, as he had been involved in the apprehension and elimination of many of the Rebel soldiers who had retreated into the center and neighborhoods of the small town. As he rode in, he realized that the home he was looking for

was one that had caught his attention during the battle, its ornate architecture and well-kept grounds making it evident that people of means and importance resided there.

He slowed his horse to a walk as they traveled up the cobblestone carriageway that circled in front of the large stone house. He dismounted and tied the horse to the hitching post to which a team of horses was secured, horses that were already tethered to a buckboard wagon. But this wagon was not in the same worn and battered condition as most that would be seen on the roads and streets during wartime. On the bed of the wagon rested an ornate and large trunk that appeared to be made from mahogany and rich leather. And carved in the wood were the initials "E.M." Two smaller trunks sat alongside it.

The wagon was obviously either brand-new or barely used. Most of the wood appeared to be fine oak, and the leather seat appeared to be well cushioned and comfortable. Charles shook his head at the extravagance, while also appreciating that while the assignment struck him as disagreeable, he would at least be traveling in more comfort than he was used to. He pulled his saddlebags filled with his meager belongings off of his horse and tossed them onto the wagon bed as well, then pulled his rifle from its scabbard and placed it just behind the seat.

Reluctantly, he took a deep breath and stepped up onto the grand stone porch, reached for the brass doorknocker in the shape of a horse head, and rapped it against the door. Before he had even finished knocking, a young woman in a long black skirt and white blouse opened the door and gestured for him to come in. "I take it that you are Major Morrow?" Charles took off his cavalry hat and nodded. "And I take it that this is the McMannus residence?"

Before the maid could answer, a slender forty-something woman in a dark blue hoop dress entered the room. "You're at the right place, Major. I am Catherine McMannus, and I understand that you are going to be escorting our niece Emily back to her parents' farm in Ohio."

Before Charles could respond, a man who appeared to be in his early 50's wearing a white shirt and bow tie, strolled into the room tapping an elegant cane to the floor. He placed his hand on the arm of the woman who had just introduced herself and reached out his hand. "William McMannus, and I can't thank you enough for doing this for our family. My brother and his wife are very eager for their little girl to get back home... safely."

The emphasis on the man's final word was not lost upon Charles. "I can assure both of you that I will see that your niece arrives back home safe and sound. There may be some hazards along the way, but as long as she listens closely to what I tell her and follows my instructions, I

think that danger can be avoided.” The McMannuses exchanged rapid glances that Charles could not determine if they were expressions of concern or mutual amusement.

Her aunt cleared her throat quietly and stepped forward. “Major... I should tell you that Emily has been strongly objecting to the fact that we would not allow her to travel home unescorted.” She glanced at her husband, once again, before continuing. “As a matter of fact, she is somewhat angry at us, as well as her parents, for insisting that she not travel alone. And while William and I are both very supportive of those of you who serve in the Army, I’m afraid that our Emily has her own attitude about the military.”

Charles nodded in his understanding. “I have a good sense of where the dangers lie, and of course, I will be well armed should that factor become necessary. However, I am hoping for a quiet and uneventful excursion. Once we get to the Ohio River, we will be taken across the river on a barge by an Army garrison that is stationed there to safely transport people, and be on the watch for potential spies or marauders.”

Her uncle took a deep breath and grinned widely. “I guess that you have found those Rebels to be an unsavory and ruthless bunch?”

Charles looked at the floor for a moment, searching for the right words. “Actually, Mr. McMannus, with all due respect, sir... I have found that in war you are safest when you hold your enemy in the highest respect. They are fighting for what they believe in, and I am fighting for what I believe in. I feel it is my obligation to fight to preserve the Union.

“I know that there have been reports of some inexcusable acts of cruelty, but unfortunately I have found that some on our side have been guilty of the same. Sometimes honor is in short supply during war.

“I just hope I never have to end another life. I have been in so many battles, some large and some small... I don’t know if I could even recall them all for you. I’m just ready for this war to be over, so that I can get back to the farm my parents left to me, and raise cattle like I helped my father do before the war and when he and my mother were still alive.”

Her uncle spoke quietly, “I’m sorry, Major. It sounds like you have experienced much loss lately. Do you have any brothers or sisters?”

Charles shook his head slowly. “I had an older brother, but he was killed at Gettysburg. So, I have to carry on the family name and livelihood.” Both of the older people murmured

expressions of condolence, when they were interrupted by a shout of, "I don't need an escort!" The emphatic statement was followed by the sound of footsteps coming down the stairway.

Charles turned to see a young woman come to a stop at the final step. She was wearing denim riding britches, boots and a western styled hat. Even from a distance, Charles could see the glare of disapproval in her expression. Her uncle gestured to her with a sweeping motion of his arm, "And this, Major Morrow, is Miss Emily McMannus, your traveling companion for however long it takes you to deliver her safely home."

Without saying a word of greeting, Emily walked loudly toward her uncle and crossed her arms defiantly. "I don't need a soldier to take me home. I quite well know the way, for I have now traveled it three times. And I am an excellent horseback rider. I don't want to ride on that silly wagon."

Her uncle sighed and shook his head. "And every time you made the trip it was with your parents. Now, Emily... I want you to understand how important it is to do what the Major tells you to do so that he can keep you safe."

Emily hissed loudly through her clenched teeth, "I won't be a threat to anyone. And there's no reason for anyone to want to harm me. And when it comes down to it, I don't want to be protected by guns. Words and reasoning are much more civilized."

Her uncle sighed loudly. "I'm sorry, Major Morrow, but we took a train trip to Lexington during her visit last summer, and Emily spent most of the weekend listening to lectures from a group of college professors from New England who were proponents of pacifism."

Charles nodded to Emily. "With all due respect, Miss McMannus, in my heart I would like to agree with those professors. Unfortunately, pacifism only works when both sides of the dispute agree to dispense with weapons and violence. If I recall correctly, it was the Rebels who started all this by firing at Fort Sumter."

Her arms still crossed, she stomped her foot loudly on the wood floor. "I'm twenty years old. I can take care of myself." She turned sharply toward Charles. "You can't be that much older than me, are you?"

Her aunt spoke up, "Emily, that's not important, and hardly polite to a man who has been sent here at your parents' request."

A slight smile appeared on the Major's face. "That's all right, ma'am... I'm twenty-five years old."

Emily wheeled toward the older couple and uttered a high-pitched, “See what I mean?” She let out a huff of breath. “He’s only five years older than me.”

Her uncle put his hands on her shoulders. “And he’s already a Major in the Army.” Her uncle gestured toward the soldier. “Emily, doesn’t that tell you something about him?”

She stiffened in her stance and shook her head slowly, still seething, “It tells me he knows whose Army of the Republic’s rear ends to kiss.”

Her aunt stepped over and gripped Emily by the elbow. “Emily, my dear, your uncle William and I love you like you were our own daughter, but that was uncalled for. You may be twenty years old, but if you make another disrespectful statement like that, I’m going to send a telegraph to your mother telling her that you could use some time with Red Rose.”

Emily suddenly blushed a deep red, and then seemed to shrink her already petite frame. Her uncle broke the uncomfortable silence, “Major, when do you think that Emily could possibly be arriving home? Today is Monday, possibly by Wednesday evening?”

Charles nodded, “Possibly.”

Emily poked her finger at the revolver that rested in the holster at his hip. “Do you have to wear that thing?”

Charles exhaled a deep sigh and placed his hands on his hips and leaned close to the defiant young woman. “Miss McMannus... I have intelligence from the Army that tells us that we should encounter very few problems. However, if there would be any bad men along the way wanting to cause us some problems, I doubt that they would be armed with slingshots. So, to answer your question, yes, the gun stays at my side.”

Emily huffed and folded her arms once more and turned partially away from him. Then she looked at him and then her aunt and uncle with an expression of acceptance and resignation that appeared to be a little bit exaggerated. She looked down and murmured, “If it has to be.”

Before he could respond, Emily let out an audible breath, “Excuse me for a moment. I have one more little bag of necessities to bring from my room.” She began to walk away toward the back of the first floor of the house, and as she did so, Charles found himself unwittingly captivated by her womanly form outlined in the riding denims and the checked shirt, and the way that her long brown wavy hair fell onto her back.

As soon as she had walked away, her aunt exhaled deeply. “We apologize for Emily’s demeanor. It seems that my brother and my sister-in-law, in spite of their best efforts, raised a

rather spirited and rebellious daughter. It's not that she wasn't raised with a healthy dose of discipline, but nonetheless well... you can see the results."

Her uncle began to ask Charles about the different places he had gone with the Army, and as the minutes passed by, her aunt began to nervously glance back toward the hallway. Nonetheless, her husband kept on chatting with Charles about not only the Army, but the farm he had grown up on.

Aunt Catherine spoke up. "I had best go and see what is keeping Emily. And Major, we want to apologize in advance if she is a problem for you."

Charles allowed himself to laugh. "I suppose it's only going to make me have a deeper appreciation of some quiet service at Camp Harrison. After all, if I can't handle a pretty little..."

Suddenly, their attention was diverted by a high-pitched squeal and the sound of rapid hoof beats. They all ran to the door only to see Emily riding away at full speed... to the north, of course. Charles placed his hand against his forehead as he looked down. "My horse." He slapped his hat against the doorframe. "She took my horse. My horse!" Her uncle looked down and shook his head... "Oh, no." Her aunt simply placed her hands on the sides of her head, her mouth wide open in shock and embarrassment.

Still stunned by what had happened, they all ambled down the porch steps as Charles looked off in the distance to see the incorrigible Emily and his horse barely still in sight. Her uncle squeezed the soldier's shoulder. "Just go ahead and take the wagon. Hopefully she will come to her senses and you can catch up with her."

Charles nodded and hopped up on to the plush and padded seat of the buckboard. He tried to speak, then threw his hands up in exasperation. "After I find her, and as soon as I can get to some telegraph office..." He shook his head, seized the reins and took off on his quest to ride a wagon and catch up with the bullheaded young woman who had taken his lightning fast horse.

Every minute or so as the afternoon passed, Charles would slow his horses down to look at the shoed hoof prints in the dust. He had ridden the same horse for over a year, and he was well familiar with the tracks it left. Although he knew that in terms of speed, he could not begin to catch up to Emily should she fail to slow down, and at least the road leading north toward the Ohio River valley was dusty enough that he could track her as long as he had daylight.

But there were only a couple of hours of daylight left, and the slight, unarmed and greatly petulant young woman would soon be traveling in the dark. Recalling her comment about having

made the trip before, he assumed that she would likely stay on the most traveled paths along the way. But he was concerned that she would misjudge the distance and be forced to come to a stop for the night where she may be more vulnerable to the human hazards that possibly awaited.

He stopped where a stream came close to the edge of the road, so that the horses could drink and munch on the abundant grass. He did know that there was a small barrel of grain behind the seat, but decided to save that for a situation in which the horses may need to be fed while he was attempting to be out of sight. He let them rest for a while, then resumed at a slow pace, his worry for the young woman increasing as darkness fell along the tree-lined dirt road.

The trek continued, the horses now at a pace that was nothing more than a walk. He pulled out his pocket watch and saw that it was midnight, and it was his hope that Emily would have become frightened enough by the darkness that she would have stopped somewhere so that he would have a chance of finding her. But he did not know if she would call out to him in her fear, or stubbornly stay hidden from him so that he would pass by and not find her.

He felt his blood begin to run cold at the thought of some less than honorable men coming upon Emily before he did. After all, she was unarmed, small and... pretty. Very pretty. Very pretty and well-shaped for that matter, and he suddenly could not get the angry but beguiling face and the sway of her generous backside as she walked away in anger out of his mind. Suddenly felt waves of fear overwhelming him, fear that greatly exceeded any concerns about his failure to carry out his mission. Somewhere, up ahead in the darkness, a beautiful young woman was alone in an area occasioned by various kinds of ne'er-do-wells.