

Melissa Merritt

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Email: hismercysurrounding@yahoo.com

Reclining in a cane chair, Ethan closed his eyes and shooed a buzzing fly away from his head. It was the hottest day he ever remembered in Tennessee, and even the shade provided from the sprawling oak only served to cut the temperature enough to allow him to breathe. He was recovering slowly from his war wounds, but this scorching heat was worse than the pain below his stump of a leg. He tipped the last bit of water into his mouth, but only got a drop or two, and licked his lips, tasting tin.

He was about to prop himself up on crutches and replenish his water when he heard the noise: a boom like a cannon. He froze, fingernails digging into palms, eyes wide, limbs trembling. Firing all around; he must shoot! General Lee was counting on him, as were his friends nearby—Tommy was moaning, his ear a bloody stub. Asa was already dead. Smoke, lots of smoke—where was his rifle? He charged forward, stumbled, fire jabbing his leg. Tears blended with the smoke, creating a distorted picture of a blue-clad soldier, peering down at him, saber in hand. "God, help!" he pleaded.

Someone was gripping his arm, calling, "Ethan! Are you all right?"

He smelled rose and lemon. Above him was a woman, dark hair, gray dress, a comrade—but why out in harm's way? He blinked, things becoming clearer. His wife! Why was she here? . . . But then, he was home, not on the field of battle. Stillness reigned, not artillery fire.

"Rachel!" His mouth wobbled, and he clung to her.

"Shh," she whispered, "you're safe, God brought you home. The war is over."

Over in all but his mind.

Ethan's heartbeat slowed gradually. "It felt so real—but I should'a known it wasn't," he said, grimacing. "It's happened so many times before."

"But not in a long while," Rachel soothed.

Ethan detected a pounding noise and lifted his head to see a horse and rider like a black bird of prey swooping in their direction. The hoof-beats thundered, then quieted, dust swirling about the dancing legs near them.

"A cave-in! There's been a cave-in at the mine!" The rider, Billy Alders, announced between gulps of air. He rubbed a dirty hand across his sweating forehead.

Rachel gasped and held a hand to her throat. "Was anyone inside?"

"Two dynamite men—the others got out in time. One is Jim Lyle, the other is a Yankee, Daniel Compton."

A Yankee? Ethan had not heard of him before, and could hardly comprehend it. Why would a Northerner come South, working and now expecting help? How dare he!

" . . . need your help, Ethan. We heard you say something about how you've tried shaping blasts, so the rocks scatter in one direction—?"

This Yankee was likely in the Union Army, taking away the lives of Ethan's friends! He could almost see the man now, a gun gripped tightly beneath an angry mouth. But there was another man in the mine, too, and he was a Southerner.

"Yes, I'll help, but I've no guarantee of anything," Ethan answered. "I've only read about it and made some experiments."

"We gotta try—there's not much time to lose."

Ethan nodded. "I have some powder in the barn." He grabbed his crutches and tried to keep up with the fleet-footed Billy.

"This it?" Billy pulled out a barrel marked with a large red X.

"Yep. Now get my metal pieces—they're in a blue crate in the loft."

Everything went fast, but Ethan felt in a daze, moving by rote. The wagon wheels bumped over ruts as Rachel gripped the reins. He felt like half a man anymore, manhood taken along with the half of his leg, memories haunting many of his waking hours, sometimes seeping into his dreams, awaking him and his wife as he screamed like a baby. The baby they couldn't have.

His mind was yanked to the present when men surrounding their wagon recounted at a fast clip what had happened and the problems they faced. Background noises of metal clanking on rock distracted him, but he strained to listen to their voices.

"That Yankee and Jim Lyle were working with dynamite—and *wham*—the whole back of it collapsed! We were close enough to the entrance to get out . . ."

"We're tryin' to get 'em out, but it could take all day, and we don't know if they have enough air to live."

"That's why we need your help, to blast 'em out, but without hurting 'em!"

Ethan swallowed back fear and tried to speak with confidence. "There's a chance I can do it, yes. With God's help."

While some put their efforts into digging with shovels, picks, axes, and even metal buckets, Ethan pried the top off his crate. Rachel came to his side, her eyes wide. "Can I do anything?"

"Pray," Ethan returned. "Pray hard."

Ethan took the pieces that made up his charge. He filled the back with gunpowder, and inserted a hollow metal cylinder in the front. When he was nearly done with his intricate work, he called a halt to the digging. "I need to know what side of the cave-in they're on. Can we listen a while between a few signal taps?"

The group consented, quieting almost instantly.

Ethan held his breath. His ears picked up a faint pinging noise beyond the rubble. "I hear something!"

"That's gotta be them! Jim's alive!" Billy whooped.

"On the left side," Ethan mused. He bowed his head over his powder-filled charge, praying silently, *Lord, make this work. Protect the people inside.* A fuse snaked its way out the back of the metal charge. He wedged the device in a small cavity in the piled-up rocks.

"Everyone stand back." His voice was calm, but laced with enough volume and authority that the people scattered like crows scared off by a rabid dog. They settled again on the hill opposite the cave.

Sucking in a breath, Ethan found the end of the charge fuse, some four feet from the cave-in. A solitary match is all it would take, the difference between silence and blast, quiet and chaos—life and death. Prayers resounded in his mind. He struck the match and touched it to the fuse. It flared up like a mini fire-breathing dragon. He fumbled to situate his hands on his crutches, backing away, tripping. Rachel cried out. He righted himself and hobbled as fast as he could toward the safety of his wagon.

Within a minute, the explosion scattered rocks. Dust cleared, and a three-foot wide hole gaped up at them.

After a moment of quiet, the men descended. They looked at each other—who would enter first? While they were still deciding, a man coated in dirt, limping slightly, clothes tattered, emerged from the tunnel, like the biblical Lazarus coming out of the tomb.

"Daniel Compton!" a man exclaimed. Then, "Where's Jim?"

"He's dead," Daniel murmured. "From the initial blast."

Ethan clenched his fists. And this Yankee had barely a scratch on him! "Maybe you planned this in order to kill Jim and us Southerners!" He couldn't seem to stop the accusation from coming out, no matter how illogical it might sound.

Daniel's mouth dropped open. "Jim and I were good friends." His face crumpled. "I'd rather it had been I who died than he!"

Ethan swallowed a sour taste in his throat. What if he wished this man dead? It was wrong, dead wrong, but he could not force himself to continue the Good Samaritan role. He closed his eyes. *God, how can I help this man? How can I—love him?* Then he was struck with

the thought, *How could Jesus love me, I who pierced His hands and feet with my sins?* Tears dotted his eyes. *God, forgive me!* He knew what he must do.

Just a few steps over, and he was in front of Daniel. He stuck out a hand, "Forgive me, Mr. Compton. The War has messed me up some. Northerners—" He shook his head and shrugged. "It'll just take time and prayer for me to get over. We'll get you to a doctor."

Daniel smiled. "I understand, and thank thee. And thee may call me what some of my friends do: Quaker Dan."