

# THE KNIFE SHARPENER

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**Gettysburg**  
**June 30, 1863**

He has a grindstone and a clubfoot. From what she can tell, the grindstone is easier to get around with than the foot. “Keeps me out of this fine mess, though,” says the traveling knife sharpener, jerking his head in some indeterminate direction where apparently the fine mess is happening. Then he judges just how dull Mr. Purdy’s cleaver is by bouncing his thumb lightly along it.

In the late June swelter of her orderly hometown with its whitewashed fences and lawful skies and fields, Tillie Pierce sizes up this knife sharpener hailing, as he calls it, from Hagerstown, where the folks have enough sense to hedge their bets. To emphasize his point, John Shafer gives the wheeled wooden frame of the grindstone a hefty tug, holds out a hand as though leading a lady onto the dance floor, and shy Mrs. Skylar hands him two pairs of her paper scissors for his inspection.

They line up. The barber, the tailor, three quilters with tiny scissors, the banker with the family turkey carving knife, even Jennie Wade, who comes up with some mismatched kitchen knives just to flirt with this traveling red-headed stranger from Maryland with a grindstone and a clubfoot. Soon it thunders. The knife sharpener hitches at his waistband, and then with his regular foot pumps the treadle and sets the dull blade of the cleaver against the spinning grindstone.

In a way, Tillie thinks, she is glad she is fifteen and has no tools to sharpen. Jennie Wade is twenty and really has no tools to sharpen either, only she likes to pretend she runs her married sister’s household, just to show anyone interested what a domestic catch she is, her with her brown hair coiled like a rattler and her hands dotted with bits of dough that didn’t make it into the final loaf.

“Who you like in the fight,” calls out Jennie Wade’s little brother Sam. A challenge to the knife sharpener. “I’ll bet it’s Johnny Reb.” Someone cuffs Sam’s head. Someone else shushes everyone in the general vicinity.

John Shafer doesn’t even have to think about it. “I like the man who helped

me and my tools into the back of his wagon and took me all the way to the bottom of your Taneytown Road." At that, there are murmurs. "That's who I like."

"You don't care about slaves or freemen?"

"Where can you find me some?"

"Slaves?" chirps Mr. Purdy, sliding a watery glance to the others. "Back in Hagerstown, I'm thinking."

"Freemen," says John Shafer, steadying himself on his clubfoot, shoed in a special sheath of hand-stitched leather. "I ain't seen one yet." Glancing the blade's edge against his tanned palm, he springs a sharp line of blood, gives it a look Tillie can't read, and then grins at his customers. "Not of any color, no sir." When the crowd falls silent, pondering philosophy in a knife sharpener, Tillie watches him grit his teeth and swing his leg outward to angle his clubfoot in the right direction. What follows then is a battery of small steps to balance himself. Then he presents the cleaver to Mr. Purdy with a dip of his red head. "That'll be ten cents, thank you kindly."

Just enough manners to get by, wondering, maybe, whether another fellow in a wagon will give him and his tools a ride to a place where folks need their knives sharpened for ten cents. When he bends to get a drink of water from a shiny tin can, Tillie swings her leg outward in the same arc, just to see what every single turn during every single waking moment must be like for this knife sharpener, and she gets tangled up in her skirts. Even a flurry of steps doesn't help her get her balance, and the tailor makes a grab for her arm. Jennie Wade rolls her eyes at the quilter Miss Cardwell with the thin, shapeless lips, as though they agree on just how impossible the Pierce girl is.

As John Shafer runs his forearm across his mouth, his blue eyes meet Tillie's, and he raises an eyebrow and shoots her a small smile. A better one than the big grin you show people when you want to convey no harm done, no matter what you really mean. In that moment, Tillie knows her skirts are her clubfoot. A clubfoot of cotton and muslin.

Dark clouds collide and raindrops spatter in the dry dust of the main street. The customers scatter, dashing from the kind of shower that quits in five minutes, offering shelter to the redheaded knife sharpener from Maryland, running with their dull knives slicing away the heavy air. Tillie watches him quickly fold up the frame, hoist the handles that pull the grindstone up on its wheel, and lurch awkwardly behind, thanking Mr. Purdy kindly for the offer of his barn for bedding down, nothing fancy.

"Can't you just leave the grindstone here?" In that way as head usher he shows worshippers into their pews on Sundays, Mr. Purdy gestures to the grass just off the dusty street.

"My stone stays with me," says the knife sharpener quietly.

Mr. Purdy tries again. "No one will bother it."

"My stone stays with me."

Done with talking sense to a tradesman from, really, Heaven knows where, Mr. Purdy picks up his pace. Hitching up her cotton and muslin handicap, Tillie trots alongside them, fielding the rushed conversations. The knife sharpener has a bedroll, yes, but no, there's no help for a clubfoot other than what he can do for himself, yes, he's about twenty-five, no, he didn't spot any Federals on his way into town, yes, it's a mystery what Lee's Army has in mind, no, never considered spying as an alternative form of service. Here John Shafer adds something about it not being his fight, nothing beyond keeping alive is his fight, the way he sees it. No, indeed, his heart doesn't rise near clean out of his chest with love for our boys in blue, nor for our boys in gray, neither.

She stops at the open gate in the picket fence at her yard. "Well," calls Tillie, "what does your heart rise near clean out of your chest for, then?" It would have to be interesting, more interesting than battles that only move around and never end.

The knife sharpener sets down the handles of the wheeled grindstone.

"Oh, now," says Jennie smoothly, "our Mr. Shafer can't afford to have his heart do that, not when there's work to be done, no help from the likes of you," she finishes in that mean, throwaway manner she has. Her coiled rattler hair is beginning to slip down the back of her head, and she tells our Mr. Shafer she'd bring him a fresh loaf of her best bread in the morning. But Tillie is looking at the knife sharpener. His face is turned toward the sky, watching, she thinks, for raindrops to clear the air, the dust, the hardships, the years, and nothing comes.

Then.

First come the armies.

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Later, Rebel raiders thunder through the defenseless town, where people gawp at how goldarn free they make themselves with any unoffered food they can find already inside on dining tables. Exactly what relation these threadbare, wild-haired skirmishers have to do with the fearsome Army of Northern Virginia, no one can say. At the Pierce house, they steal shoes, the hired boy, and the mare Tillie considers her very own. Her father, James Pierce, has had enough. Tillie always knows when he's had enough when he pushes up his shirtsleeves like the amateur scrapper he was in his life before marriage, family, Quaker meeting, and the Pierce's Choice Meats store. He stalks after the two villains whooping half-on half-off the mare with the hired boy tucked under the winchlike arms of one of them.

"See here! See here!" he demands in his magistrate's voice, grabbing the mare's mane while another raider brandishes a sorry-looking pistol and Tillie's mother staggers backwards. Tillie watches her father make a strong case for keeping what is theirs, and finally, these skirmishers must not have

grown to manhood without some Bible verses tucked up somewhere under their wavy, dirty hair. They drop the hired boy in the dust, who scrambles away, terrified, and the thieves clamber off, admiring the stolen shoes on their lawless feet. Tillie's shoulders droop. So do her father's.

What they had really wanted back was the mare.

"The Flower of Dixie," jeers her father, watching the Rebel raiders take off up the main street. His gray eyes narrow, with that soft look she only ever sees when he is picturing their ancestors traveling into a wilderness with William Penn, when any of the tales that come down from cradle to cradle through the years all have large portions of danger and beauty. "We're in for it, my girl. Best to get you away."

Word comes, the way it always does.

Word comes from the dairyman that Buford's cavalry—three cheers!—is arriving.

Word comes from a Union camp photographer named Gardner that scouts place General Lee's Army north of Gettysburg. When a woman in the small crowd cries, well, what in God's Creation is he doing there, a man intones, "Harrisburg!" Tillie watches a chill sweep across the faces when a great, shared fear makes them shiver. "He's here. In the North. Oh, dear God," flies around the town in the same tone as the time the seventeen-year locusts were spotted, or a hired girl came down with tuberculosis. People scatter, some running for shelter from what they can't even imagine, others running toward the center of town where any sight worth viewing you can surely find there.

Down the dusty street comes John Shafer, wheeling his entire life in a trade barrow, his bedroll lashed across the handles, a hunk of Jennie Wade's best bread carried between his teeth. The air feels heavier than Tillie has ever known it. It swallows sounds—Buford's cavalry like an earthquake rumbling up the northside of town to the Cashtown Pike and the action—muffling everything she can see or hear like that brown dog barking up by the dry goods store, or the librarian hammering the shutters closed over that stately little building while she sobs and shakes her head. Tillie offers the knife sharpener a ride to the Weikert Farm, just three miles south, where they can be safe. Waving her on, John Shafer says he will catch up, thank you kindly. With skirmishers and gunfire nearby, and a three mile walk ahead of him, she really doesn't see how.

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## July 1

Overnight the Weikert barn is converted into a field hospital where in the daytime gloom Tillie sits patting a bloodstained bandaged wrist when she looks down and sees there are no fingers. The boy soldier winces, his lips moving, and she thinks maybe she's hurting him, so she moves the patting

farther up the ruined arm, which is when she hears him call her Mother. One mattress over from this boy is an older soldier, not by much, the bed-sheet flat where his leg ought to be, hoarse from wailing in pain. One mattress beyond that is the only place she can find silence as the man on it, with bandages on his head, around his chest, up and over his hip turn pink with blood that just wants to get the hell out of that poor wreck, dies before her eyes. With no one to sit with him and hold his hand and tell him he was ever so good and brave and patriotic.

She, Tillie, is just a useless girl with no important role to play. She can win no ground, turn back no foe, defend no line. She is tolerated courteously like she is performing a cross-hand piece on the parlor piano for dinner guests. Ladles of spring water are no help. Prayers and curses are no help. Only the killer sharp edges of John Shafer's work helps, as the field surgeons set about their gory jobs.

She sways as she stands up from the mattress of the fingerless boy soldier. "Mother—?" His other hand reaches for her, catches her skirts instead. Tillie bends, lays a palm on his cheek, feels the muscles trembling underneath. What she is suddenly remembering is the story her father once told her about how when he was twelve he pulled a little girl out of the way of the mail coach hell-bent on getting to Philadelphia by noon. In his experience, he told Tillie, the truest decisions are the ones made in an instant. Oh, there was going to be a calamity, all right, but in half an instant James Pierce knew it was going to be either a dead child for sure, or a possibly dead child anyway and a very injured James Pierce. In the other half an instant, he leaped, grabbed, and rolled them both mostly to safety, although it took some time for her two broken ribs and his one broken leg to heal.

Looking down at the boy soldier trying to hold on to her skirts, she strokes his damp cheek. "Now you get some rest. I'll be back soon, son." Tillie stumbles over the dead, the nurses, the Weikerts themselves, as she finds her way out of the barn, her hand clamped over her mouth. From everywhere comes the whistling thunk of shells. The air is a red mist, every atom visible with spent lives. Whizzing bullets, agonized whinnies, clashing steel—she staggers to the back of the barn, and witnesses the Little Round Top alive with struggle, too close for comfort. Someone calling her Girlie—"What?" she yells, "What?"—pulls her back around toward the side. "Sharpshooters!" She stares at the mouth of an aide, the word low and muffled and strung out, like the two of them are somewhere underwater, barely visible to each other, trying to say something that matters. Tillie wonders if this is what going deaf is like. Eardrums blown out like men's eyes and brains.

She hopes for deafness.

She yearns for it.

## July 2

Propped up against the whitewashed barn is a dead sentry, picked off right where he stood, slumping into sitting like he'd just had a mighty fine chicken leg at the county picnic. Tillie catches sight of the knife sharpener just inside the hospital tent set up in the Weikerts' front yard. Next to him is a stack of blades and knives and scissors waiting for his attention. He is hunched over the grindstone, his face set. In the setting sun, sweat glistens on his face, and the spinning grindstone feels to Tillie like their whole godforsaken world that makes no more sense than anything else in Gettysburg.

Inside the tent are amputation benches, outside are barrows where limbs are piled. Orderlies wheel them out of sight, like hauling manure to garden plots, returning quickly, their carts empty. Other orderlies circulate from bench to bench, keeping patient records. Tillie heads for John Shafer, where she will borrow scissors.

And they will be as sharp as all the best sins.

From a wagoner she gets some gloves, from a record-keeping orderly she gets a pencil, from a sutler selling pipe tobacco she gets wires, and from John Shafer she gets the loan of brass-handled dressmaker scissors he digs out of his unclaimed bag and the blank tags he uses to identify customers' goods. These she slips into the US government-issued haversack she pulled from a pile of the belongings of the dead and now wears slung over her shoulder. When the wagoner gave her a skeptical look and asked what a girl like her'd be wanting with work gloves, she shot back, "Burial detail."

Then she slips inside the front door of the farmhouse, finds a shadowy corner out of sight of the officers eating biscuits and gravy standing up, no time for more, not hardly, some with tattered uniforms and maps and shoe leather. Everything smells. Around them women rustle and clatter, setting down platters, refilling water jugs. As Tillie cuts off her fussy sleeves and opens up the neckline, she hears the scraps of conversations.

Twentieth Maine held the Round Top, Lee's going to have to try to break us at the center, madness, oh, but we'll give him one hell of a surprise. More like a thousand surprises, an officer manages to say around a biscuit he works on swallowing. Tired laughs. In the short weary silence one officer pipes up that Longstreet should know better. Someone else tops him with Longstreet does know better. Good at what he does, but that man couldn't coax a hungry mule with a feed bag.

A thousand surprises.

More troops? But where?

With her heart beating faster, Tillie runs the busy scissors clear around the waistband of her dress and steps out of the silly yards of fabric that only slow her down. Now all she wants is deafness and speed. Two things, now. Finally, in four big slices, off comes her hair, which she kicks into a corner, and slips upstairs

into the Weikert boy's room, where she trades a pair of his knickerbockers for her bloomers, cutting just enough from the castoff to make a bandana.

As she springs down the narrow steps, she is light and free, she is sleeveless and airy, a girl from some other time and place, emancipated. Outside, the sun is disappearing over the western horizon, known in these parts as Emmitsburg Road, casting them all into a place of ghastly wonderment, a savagery of ideas. She slows as she makes her way unbothered through the hanging heat to the stack of amputated limbs she spots as high as the Weikert's stone fence. A single orderly in half a blue uniform and a limp moustache is stacking more limbs like he's expanding the drystone wall. He gives her a neutral look, taking in a white muslin bandana covering her nose and mouth.

"Any of these from—" here she fishes for what she means—"the newly dead?"

For a second, the orderly glances away, then back, with a weak shrug. "Why?"

"We give the family as much as we can for burial."

His eyes narrow. "On whose authority?"

"I believe," says Tillie slowly, giving him a level look, "on mine."

They stand sizing each other up. Finally, he sets his gloved hands on his hips. "Well, then," is all he says. Together they decide on a new pile, a small pile, just then only three he can say for sure belonged to soldiers who barely made it off the amputation benches before they died. All legs. He gives her their names and companies, which she pencils on tags, and he quickly pierces each with a wire and loops it around the cold, useless toes.

"Coffins," he suddenly raises his voice, "are getting loaded in the wagons alongside the tent—let's go!" With just three body parts in the wheelbarrow, they lope off toward the tent, bouncing their load across the rough barnyard in their haste. Just three limbs. So few. But three more than these families would have if she hadn't tried. How much everything seems to depend, thought Tillie, on knowing what matters. On knowing what matters and deciding in an instant.

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Soon she shares a tin plate from a soldier's mess kit at the plank table in the Weikerts' basement kitchen. The Weikerts provide the beef stew, the camp cook the hardtack. A woman from a neighboring farm pours coffee. No one comments on Tillie's clothes. Very likely no one notices. Knife sharpener up top needs a meal, comes a voice from up the stone steps. A weary captain drags himself over to the doorway, where he stands shuffling, then calls up, send him on down. No special treatment here. In the dark, awkward silence, the knife sharpener answers, I have a clubfoot, sir, and cannot manage the stairs.

"I've got it, sir," says Tillie, to the captain already back slouching on a bench. One less task. Tillie slings together a quick plate of stew and hard-tack and starts up the stairs, despite the heat, the stone steps exhaling a vaporous cold like something you don't want to see come out of hiding. Cannot manage the stairs, he has said evenly, out of a life's worth of sentences that begin with the words I have a clubfoot . . . and cannot manage a Virginia reel, a bent-knee proposal, a forced march, a thrust with a bayonet, a slow steady aim down the sights of a rifle musket—or, for that matter, even the stairs.

John Shafer steps into the last of the light there in the dim back hall of the Weikert farmhouse, and stares in his lonely neutrality at the thick clot of beef and potatoes. He is looking around for a table, when a lieutenant, one with an uncooperative blond beard but a lot of energy, comes up the steps two at a time with directions from the missus for the girl Tillie to show him up to the entrance to the roof. Word has come down from the Old Snapper himself to survey the battlefield and report back how things, well, stand. At that, the lieutenant lets out a shrill whistle, and whispers, "Meade!" Tillie nods tightly. John Shafer grabs her arm and when she turns, gives Tillie a congested look. "The knife sharpener's coming too," she says to the lieutenant.

Across the soldier's face is a moment's indecision while he rotates his field glasses in a jumpy way, and then catches sight of the clubfoot. "Why, of course," he says in that pitying tone Tillie hardly heard since the battle started, even though there was much to pity. Up they go, stew forgotten, a tight, awkward threesome, to a closet on the second floor that houses a wall-mounted wooden ladder leading to the hinged trapdoor. Tillie and the lieutenant, whose name is O'Brien, step out onto the rooftop, and slowly making his way behind them, grunting, and swearing, is the knife sharpener.

They look to the north, the lieutenant pointing out Baltimore Pike, the artery into the town itself. There in the last light of the day, Lee's headquarters, Meade's headquarters, Ewell's Corps, to the northwest A.P. Hill's Corps. Then their eyes settled on the sunset side of the panorama, where the encampment seems to stretch forever. "That there's Longstreet," breathes the lieutenant, and with a knowing nod, "he likes that formation for tents, plus flying the Stars and Bars." Tillie comments there are thousands of troops. O'Brien lowers his glasses. "From up here they look like fields of winter rye where I'm from in Minnesota." He sounds wistful.

The three of them turn slowly toward the right, toward the Union encampment. Their eyes sweep what they expect to find, O'Brien names Newton's Corps just there, and Hancock's Corps just there. A few lanterns coming on like scattered fireflies, occasional shouts, slow wagons carrying their fallen loads.



Then, in a low, cold voice, John Shafer asks, "What's that?" He points far to the right, looking southeast from their position to a long low natural depression in the landscape screened from the ground by thickets of trees. O'Brien is estimating troop strength in a murmur, and then stops to look where the knife sharpener points. It takes them all a good minute before they understand what they are seeing from their rooftop galley. "Reserves," says O'Brien a little too quickly. "Got to be Sedgwick's Sixth." How many troops lie flattened against the conspiring landscape? No tents, no campfires, no lanterns.

"There are thousands," whispers Tillie.

"If Uncle John brought his whole family," says O'Brien slowly, his eyes pressed into the field glasses, "then it's upwards of ten thousand." Tillie catches her breath, her eyes sweeping the Gettysburg battlefield for as far as she could see. While they stare at what O'Brien calls Sedgwick's Sixth, Tillie feels breathless at the strange majesty of it. These are rows of the living, not the dead. Troops passing the night ahead unsheltered, literally lying in wait for their orders. Slowly, they put together the significance of what they are witnessing. "I've got enough," says the lieutenant, finally, who pities a club-foot, "let's go."

Tillie turns. The knife sharpener is gone.

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In the soft and gentle darkness, the darkness before deep night takes away all the points of reference, the roofline of the barn, the path to the outhouse, and whatever flowers overflow their boxes, Tillie searches for the knife sharpener, moving through scattered shouts and shrieks until what answers are those few stars that locate her on sorry Earth. At last she discovers John Shafer near the corner of Wheatfield Road, only the starlight naming him to her. A crossroads, in the starlight that knows no better than who still stands, who still breathes, and who still yearns in the Gettysburg of all time.

Beside him stands the grindstone, and she watches in the near darkness as he pumps the treadle until that stone starts spinning good and proper, and he half turns his head with the red hair that looks no better than black in the dim light, and blinks at her in acknowledgment. She watches in silence, not asking him why he left that fatal rooftop because at fifteen years old Tillie knows somehow it is fatal.

She watches as he sets his bare hands down on the spinning grindstone, his hands just more old, tarnished, and compromised things unless they get sharpened into life. He holds those hands there for a few seconds in something like a benediction. When he lifts them off the grindstone and the wheel slows to a stop she briefly sees a raggedness, an almost bloody roughness from how the grindstone has acknowledged John Shafer, who then sets aside. He says nothing.

Waiting to see what he does, she silently follows the knife sharpener as he heads steadily down the road from the Weikert Farm. Her body grows cold as the distance between John Shafer and the grindstone becomes larger. Lurching along, he still hasn't made up his mind, Tillie can tell, because he doesn't have a father who speaks about true decisions made in an instant. But they come to the crossroads where everything is suddenly left to its own devices. With the three stars lighting her way, and with distant camp lanterns asking her to act, the knife sharpener does the unthinkable and turns west.

Toward General Longstreet's camp.

Tillie trembles as the full understanding of what he is choosing hits her like a minié ball that has brought down so many others. It will be the last thing she says to him, the last thing she knows for sure. "Oh, don't, oh, don't," she hears her own strained voice so she knows he must too, and still he walks, a black shadow now in the path west down the deserted road. John Shafer from Hagerstown, Maryland, who takes no sides at all and keeps alive with ten cents here and ten cents there, is heading for the camp of General Longstreet. John Shafer looked upon the corps of hidden Union troops and finally found his heart.

But where does that leave hers?

Longstreet is a mile away, him with the smart, still eyes and the tall frame and sorrowful way because he knows all is lost, does he not, does he not, and here, lurching along with the clubfoot that has hidden his own heart from himself comes John Shafer knife sharpener, here to spring the tragedy, here to deliver intelligence that would matter like meteors and shifting river courses.

She follows him at a distance, and as she watches his gait become more like anyone's, as she watches his back straighten, as she watches his pace pick up, she follows. The only light comes increasingly from the lanterns ahead, now just half a mile, from the camp of General Longstreet. "John Shafer!" she blurts, not too loudly, her voice guttural. He hesitates almost imperceptibly and then shows her his very clear intention. In half a mile he'll reach Confederate pickets, guards scattered around the perimeter.

Still he walks, and as she watches he becomes more sure of himself, straighter, stronger, full of purpose, less full of holding dull knives against his grindstone, now abandoned. And in an instant, a tender instant, an instant full of inscriptions on the tablets of her life, she lets him walk. How far can she let him go? She watches as the lonely neutrality slips away from the knife sharpener. She watches as the purpose of mere survival slips away from the knife sharpener. The clubfoot, the careful diplomacy, the halting acceptance of others' kindnesses—North and South—slip away. She cries at its beauty, the silhouette of John Shafer, heading for the place that drives him, that lifts his crippled heart, until she can't let him go any farther.

In that instant.

And with a cry only she, Tillie, Tillie herself, can hear, she dashes, pulling from the haversack the unclaimed item that she now claims forever as her own, racing with the black trees flying behind her on both sides, flying. For one second, he hesitates, sensing her approach, and then continues. But it is her instant, and her true, decision. In that final moment Tillie closes in on him, hearing the dust of his steps, hearing a great white owl, Tillie still not deaf to pain, and as she draws out the brass-handled scissors, she descends on him in the black night, and she raises and plunges them into the back of the newborn Confederate spy.

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### July 3

*Tillie—Tillie*—Mrs. Weikert shakes her gently where Tillie sits outside the hospital barn on a three-legged stool, rolling bandages as heavy white as a grindstone. The cannonading, earlier, seemed to last as many years as she has been alive. Now late in the day she notices untagged limbs getting wheeled away, and hatless, shirtless, but still vertical soldiers crisscross the yard, discussing the finer points of the day's new hell. Beautiful, beautiful, they breathe, never forget it, men crumpling, splitting apart, and that damned cocky Pickett, and still the Rebel yell, or what was left, what was left when the fife and drum died away along with everything else . . .

It all came down, Tillie hears, to what was out of sight, did you see? Appearing like vengeance set free, loosed, rising up, eight thousand troops, no more like ten, did you see, did you see, hidden troops rising up, fresh and blue like Spring we none of us think we'll ever see again, rising up, remember Chancellorsville was the shout, remember it all. Where's that man got to, that knife sharpener? So unreliable, these people. Run off, joined up, clubfoot no problem, that's where we are, Lee as well. What else can he do, that old man, but pull out now, get the hell off our soil for good and ever?

Will it never rain?

What time's mess?

Wait, what's the orderly got there, looks like that slacker's grindstone, well, better the tool than the man, I say. The tool we can use, how hard can it be, the man we got to feed. Wheel it over to Mackay's surgical tent, step it up, now. Tillie rolls bandages, wondering how they will bandage her up, when they can't see the injury.

And now there's Mrs. Weikert's warm hand on her shoulder. *Tillie—Tillie—girl!*

Tillie turns. Mrs. Weikert's lips are cracked. There is a dead bluebottle fly caught in her uncombed hair, and her eyes shift nervously like they can stay no longer in a single place or she will go mad. The cracked lips are telling Tillie that the two of them are leaving for town in ten minutes by carriage to attend the burial of Tillie's friend Jennie Wade.

Word came the way it always does that poor patriotic Jennie was shot

dead by a stray bullet, what a freak act, is nobody safe in their own kitchens anymore, goes on Mrs. Weikert, who cradles the dying.

They can't do any better by poor hardworking Jennie, for now just a hurried hole in her own backyard until all this—an impatient sweep of her arm sleeved with dry bloodstains—is over and there's a proper funeral. "She died," announces Mrs. Weikert in a way Tillie knows will be the way the death story is told forevermore, "kneading bread"—Mrs. Weikert bites her cracked lips, since kneading bread is a sacred act of infinite use and transcendent meaning—for the ten loaves she was baking for her boys in blue. Tillie nods solemnly, staring at the dead bluebottle in the woman's hair.

Mrs. Weikert's chin lifts and she goes on. Jennie's grief-stricken mother has let it be known that she will bake those loaves herself—to continue Jennie's work. Some young women, Mrs. Weikert adds, full of meaning, the red-rimmed gaze quickly piercing the girl sitting on a three-legged stool, still hoping for deafness, the girl wearing a hacked bodice and what could only be her own boy's knickerbockers, the girl sitting on a pair of brass-handled dressmaker's scissors—some young women find ways to make themselves useful.

"Now go make yourself presentable."