

THE
GIRLS
OF
GETTYSBURG



BOBBI
MILLER



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For Karen, who believed in my dreams.

The future belongs to those who believe
in the beauty of their dreams.

Eleanor Roosevelt





On July 3, 1863, twelve thousand Confederate soldiers stood on Seminary Ridge, to the west of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, armed and ready to join the fight. Almost a mile away, at the end of an open field, a copse of trees marked the Union line standing firm on Cemetery Ridge. When the signal was given, the men marched across the field. The line had advanced less than two hundred yards when the Federals sent shell after shell howling into their midst.

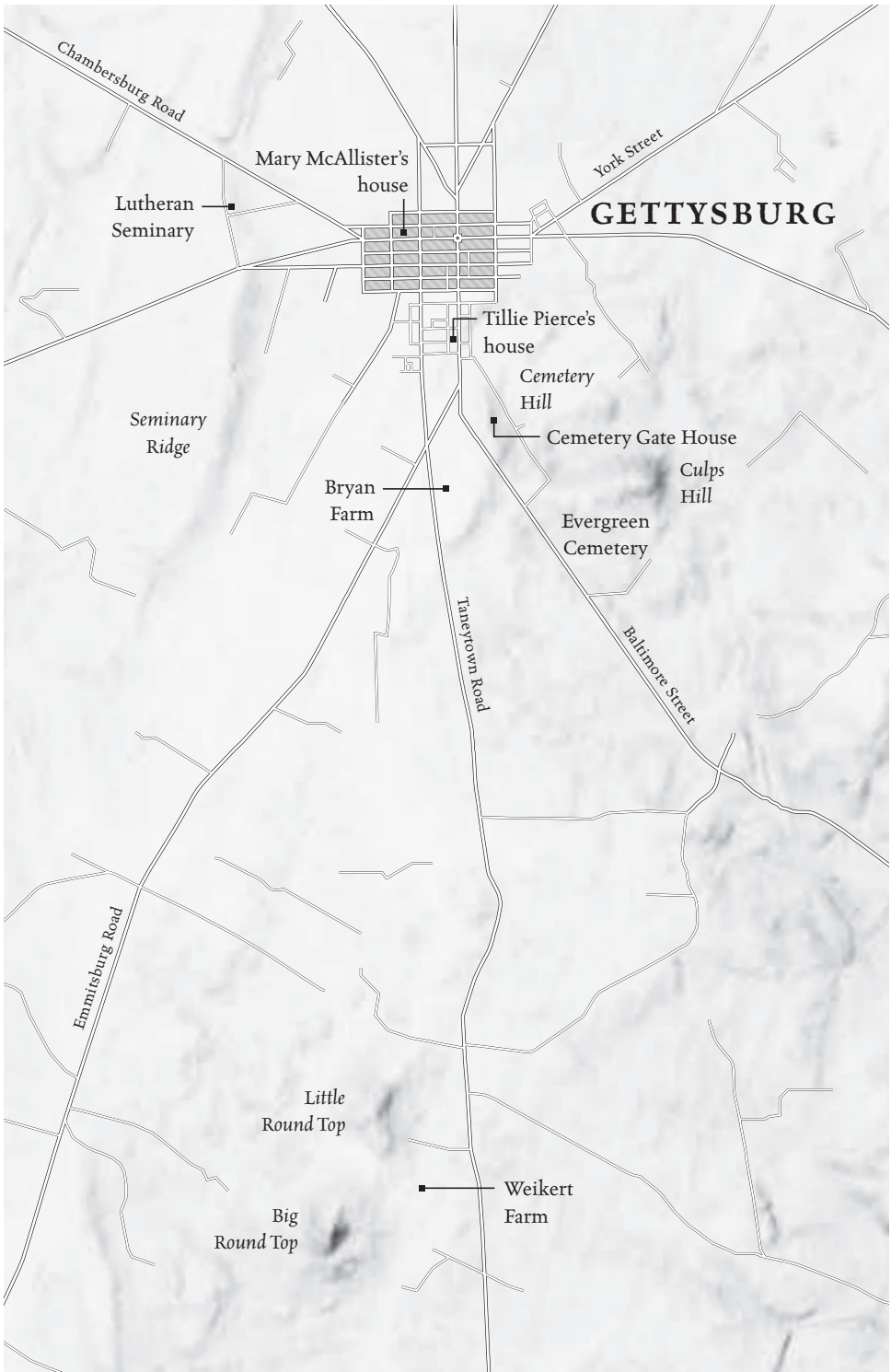
Boom! Boom! Boom! Shells pummeled the marching men. As one man fell in the front of the line, another stepped up to take his place. Smoke billowed into a curtain of white, thick and heavy as fog, stalking them.

Still they marched on.

Boom! Men fell legless, headless, armless, black with burns and red with blood. Still they marched on across that field.

When the smoke cleared, more than six thousand men lay dead or dying on the field. For days after the battle, the townspeople of Gettysburg buried the dead and tended the wounded. One Union soldier on burial detail came upon a shocking find: the body of a female Confederate soldier. But everyone knew girls were not strong enough to do any soldiering; they were too weak, too pure, too pious to be around roughhousing boys. That was why girls were not allowed to enlist in the army. So how could this ragtag girl be in the middle of a bloody battlefield? She carried no papers, so he could not identify her; instead, he buried her in an unmarked grave. A Union general noted her presence at the bottom of his report. His words—"one female (private) in rebel uniform"—became her epitaph. Her story remains a mystery.





Chambersburg Road

York Street

Mary McAllister's house

Lutheran Seminary

GETTYSBURG

Tillie Pierce's house

Seminary Ridge

Cemetery Hill

Cemetery Gate House

Bryan Farm

Culp's Hill

Evergreen Cemetery

Taneystown Road

Baltimore Street

Emmitsburg Road

Little Round Top

Big Round Top

Weikert Farm

PART ONE



NORTH . . .

May 1863



CHAPTER ONE



ANNIE

Annie sank lower in the water, like a frog in her swamp. She hid in the thick of water lilies and huckleberry overhang, moving so slow the water forgot to ripple in her wake. The morning air was thick with heat and haze, thick as grits. She couldn't see the Yanks. But she could hear their boots scraping against dirt and stone, and their voices raised in anger, looking for something.

Or someone.

They were like flies swarming in a pigsty, those Yanks, tramping along the muddy path.

One loomed out of the haze as he swerved off the path, easing near the water's edge. He stood so close she could hear his ragged breathing. Blood stained his coat and britches. His face, too, was smeared with blood, but she couldn't tell if it was his. His rifle raised, he scanned the water with hooded eyes.

Annie fingered the trigger on her rifle-musket. She couldn't shoot, not this close, or more Yanks might pounce on her like buzzards drawn to fresh kill. Her eyes flicked to the woods behind him, up the path and then down, seeing how close they might be. Suddenly the Yank froze, lowering his rifle directly at her.

"I see you, boy, there in the shadow," he growled. "Show yourself."

She heard the click as he pulled the hammer back.

Annie stood up from her crouch, pulling the brim of her hat low on her brow, and stepped out of the shadow. The Yank's eyes narrowed, taking in the full measure of her. He was as ragged as her sister's

corn-husk doll, his cheeks hollowed from hunger, his hair greasy and straggly. His bloodstained shirt seemed too big for his scarecrow arms.

This Yank was too hunger-dizzy to see through her disguise.

His finger trembled as his red-rimmed eyes fell on her musket. "That's a mighty fine gun, boy. How did a ragged puke such as you come into possession of such a rarefied find?"

Annie said nothing, tightening her grip on the gun.

"You gonna shoot me, boy?" The Yank smiled, his teeth brown with rot.

"I ain't giving you my gun." She lowered her voice to gravel, digging her heels into the mud.

The Yank chuckled. "Boy, I will shoot if'n you don't give me that gun."

Annie inhaled deep, shaking her head slowly.

The Yank grinned at her. And then a shot rang out.

I'm done for, for sure! Annie winced.

But the Yank let loose a gurgling cry as his eyes rolled white, and he slumped forward into the mud.

Annie didn't wait around to see who it was that shot, rebel or Yank. She shot off like a bullet herself. Holding her musket over her head, she slogged through the swampy water, not looking back. Half-crawling, half-dashing through the brambles, she trudged toward the shore, where finally she made it into the woods and disappeared into the shadows.

Like her brother always told her, you've got to charge ahead sometimes, come what may, through hell and high water. Just keep moving till you get where you're going. And she was going north, to join the army, where she'd find herself plenty of Yanks to kill.

CHAPTER TWO



GRACE

Grace coughed.

The day was butter-melting hot. And the classroom, set in the back of the windowless church, was so stifling, it snatched the very air out of her. The back door was opened in hopes of moving fresh air into the room, but the breeze only stirred up the dust.

Grace was worried about Millie. Millie hadn't come to school this morning, and she feared the worst. Rumors flew persistent as mosquitoes on hot, swampy days: *The rebels are coming*. She overheard Mamma telling Pappa how the rebs had been sneaking across the line, stealing into the homes of freemen, arresting entire families as fugitive slaves, taking them back to Richmond. For weeks now, one family after another had packed what they could carry on their backs and left under cover of night. The town was almost deserted of Negroes now.

Every day someone didn't come to class, and everyone knew what that meant—they had fled north.

And today Millie hadn't come.

Millie and Grace were best friends. They were going to become teachers together. Millie wouldn't leave, not without saying good-bye. Not unless something terrible had happened.

Pappa wasn't leaving. He had a farm to work. Despite all the rumors, he didn't believe the rebs would dare cross the river. Pappa was proud as a mountain, and there was no moving him if he didn't want to be moved. Not even that General Lee could move Pappa.

"I was born a free man, as was my mamma and pappa," he often

reminded Mamma. "This is my home, our home, *here in Gettysburg*. I will *not* be moved from my home."

"Stubborn old man," Mamma barked. Unlike Pappa, Mamma was always afraid. Living so close to the Mason-Dixon Line did that to her. She wanted to leave, run as fast as she could and head north. It was like a nervous tic, her fear.

"What is it that we can do here? Are you allowed to carry a gun to protect yourself? You sell the finest wheat and fruit to them, but are you allowed to shop in their stores? You pay taxes, but can you vote? Grace has the brightest mind of any child I've ever seen, and is she allowed to go to the Young Ladies' Seminary?"

"You'll see, someday Grace *will* teach at a fine school. You'll see, my baby girl will find her way when this war ends. Mr. Lincoln—and I—will see to that!"

"You think too highly of this president, Abraham Bryan. His own people hate him. They even tried to kill him, and they'll succeed one day, you mark my words. This president may find a way to end *this* war," Mamma had said. "But the bigger war will never end."

Grace turned, watching Mamma as she stood at the head of the class. Mamma loved teaching, but she didn't like coming to school these days. It was just a short trip from the farm to this church, no more than a half-hour walk through the orchard and past the fields. But it scared Mamma to be in the open.

Mamma smoothed her bun as she read, stumbling through the words. Then she looked up and sent Grace one of her Be Still looks. Grace smiled back, willing her foot to stop tap-tapping.

But it didn't stop. *Tap-tap-tap*.

"Well." Mamma closed the reader. "I can see we'll not accomplish anything more today!" She dismissed the class with a wave of her hand. "Go home straightaway, now! No dawdling, do you hear me?"

Grace made a mad dash to the door. "I have to check on Millie!"

Grace walked, then ran, along Taneytown Road into Gettysburg. Other children skittered around her, shouting and dancing down the road.

Suddenly a voice hailed her.

“Grace Bryan, stop there!”

Grace turned on her heel to face Tillie Pierce. Only a handful of years older than herself, and a hand taller, Tillie sure thought of herself as older and taller. She was the butcher’s daughter, and a student at the Young Ladies’ Seminary.

“Should you be here?” asked Tillie.

“Why not?” Grace asked.

“Why, with the war almost here in Gettysburg, just beyond the river, and so many of your kind leaving as fast as they might, I just thought your father would have taken you north by now.”

Grace could see that Tillie was trying to smile; maybe she was even trying to be nice. But unlike her fancy dress with the lace trim, it just didn’t fit very well. And then she noticed that Tillie was hiding something in her apron. She didn’t fool Grace: Tillie Pierce had stolen some of Pappa’s peaches.

“Pappa isn’t going anywhere.” Grace smiled in return, a wide smile. “No one chases us off our land—not rebels, not anyone. But here I was thinking your father had left, too. I am glad to see we are both wrong.”

“What do you mean?” Tillie lost her smile and stiffened. “Why would my father leave?”

“With so many of your kind fleeing north, I just thought your father had taken you as well.”

“My *kind*?” Tillie was squaring her shoulders. “What on earth are you prattling on about?”

“You know, *your kind* . . . Republicans.” Grace dashed off down the road, not wanting to listen to any more from Tillie Pierce. Tillie didn’t mean to be rude; she just didn’t know any better.

In the south part of town, she ran past a neat row of white board houses, each surrounded by a small rail fence, chickens pecking in the yards. Near the end of the road was Millie’s house. It was dark inside. Only the curtains moved in the breeze.

“Millie!” she pushed open the gate.

“I’m sorry, Gracie.”

Grace whirled about to face Miss Mary McAllister.

Miss Mary smiled. She was as plump as Pappa was tall, with bright

red curls flying in every direction all the way down her back. Miss Mary's store was a couple of blocks down the way, closer to the diamond in the middle of town. If it had been anyone else, Grace would have wondered how they came to be in this row of houses. But Miss Mary was a mountain, just like Pappa, and just like Pappa, she had her own way of doing things.

"They left last night, Grace," said Miss Mary. "Mrs. James was just too afraid to stay. And you shouldn't be here, child. You should be home with your mamma."

"She didn't say good-bye." Grace's stomach pinched.

"Millie will be back, Gracie. She told me to tell you, she'll be back." Miss Mary patted Grace's arm gently.

Grace shook her head in disbelief. Maybe Tillie was right. If Millie had left, then maybe Pappa was going to make her and Mamma leave Gettysburg.