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CONTENTS

Part One: The Coward

1. *Brand of a Coward*
2. *A Midnight Swim*
3. *Jake Gets an Offer*
4. *A Midnight Caller*
5. *Trip to New Orleans*

Part Two: The Impostor

6. *Man without a Star*
7. *Storm at Sea*
8. *Homecoming*
9. *Rachel's Challenge*
10. *Dinner at Lindwood*
11. *A Fancy Ball*
12. *An Impossible Task*
13. *A Very Tight Corner*

Part Three: The Bravo

14. *Ellen's Secret*
15. *Rachel's Pupil*
16. *At the White Horse Bar*
17. *God in the Camp*
18. *New Year's Miracle*
19. *A Long, Long Honeymoon!*
20. *A Late Visitor*

Part Four: The Return

21. *A Perfect Trap*
22. *Escape from Fort Donelson*
23. *Return to Virginia*
24. *At Any Cost*
25. *A Fine Case of Revenge*
26. *The World in His Arms*



PART ONE
THE COWARD



CHAPTER ONE
BRAND OF A COWARD



“RACHEL!” Les Franklin grabbed his sister’s arm and pointed toward the street. “Look, here comes Vince—and he’s so drunk he can hardly sit on his horse!”

Rachel Franklin turned at once to see her half brother, Vince Franklin, dismount by almost falling off of his horse, then stagger into the arms of Bruno, a white-haired slave. She bit her lip in vexation, watching as Bruno caught Vince and kept him from falling, only to be rewarded by Vince’s shoving him away roughly. Vince then turned to look across the crowd that had gathered for the wedding of Dent Rocklin and Raimsey Reed. He laughed loudly and moved toward the massive steps of the Congregational church, shoving his way through the crowd.

Rachel moved quickly to where her great-uncle Mark Rocklin stood. “Uncle Mark, Vince is drunk. He’ll ruin the wedding if someone doesn’t stop him!”

Mark Rocklin was a tall, lean man of fifty with a pair of dark eyes that few men cared to face when they burned with anger. He had been a misfit among the children of Noah Rocklin, who was the patriarch of the Rocklin family in Virginia. Mark had never been interested in farming, as were his brother Thomas or his sister, Marianne. Mark’s brothers Stephen and Mason had not cared for farming either, but they had found worthwhile occupations: Mason had been a professional soldier in the Union Army for years; Stephen owned a prosperous ironworks in Washington.

Mark, however, had been a wanderer, a gambler with no roots. He came back to visit Richmond only on rare

occasions, finding little there to draw him. Little, that is, except his great-niece Rachel, for the two of them had a similar temperament and so had formed a close and warm bond. Now he smiled at her, his face lighting with an uncharacteristic tenderness.

"I'll see to him, Rachel." Mark's voice was low and even, but there was purpose in his face as he moved down the steps and halted right in front of Vincent Franklin. "Hello, Vince," he said casually.

Vince stopped abruptly, almost falling. He caught himself, looked up, blinked owlishly, then said thickly, "Oh . . . Uncle Mark . . ."

"I need some company, Nephew. Come and sit with me for the wedding."

Vince reddened and an angry reply rose to his lips, but he was not too drunk to realize he had no choice. Mark Rocklin was a man of easy manners, but there was something dangerous about him. As Vince peered at his great-uncle, he suddenly remembered some of the things he'd heard about the man's past. "Why . . . sure," he muttered. He licked his lips, then said, "Maybe I'd better sit down. I don't feel so good."

"Let's sit in the balcony, Vince," Mark said, taking his arm and leading him firmly toward a side door. "We can see more from there."

As the two men disappeared inside the church, Rachel turned to her younger brother Les. "He'll behave now," she said, then added, "I wish he hadn't come."

"I'll get him to leave after it's over, Rachel," Les said. At seventeen he was almost an exact copy of his father, with the same fair skin and reddish hair. But as he moved away from her, Rachel knew that Les could not handle Vince. None of them could.

"Come along, now, Rachel—" She turned to see her father and mother at the front door. She hurried up the steps, hoping her father hadn't noticed the commotion her half brother had created. But her father glanced over her shoulder and asked, "What was the trouble with

Vince? I didn't know he was back." Brad Franklin was attired in the dress uniform of a major in the Confederate Army, sword and all. His rather hungry-looking face was tense, as it usually was whenever Vince was around, and he shook his head angrily. "Why did he come at all?"

Nothing brought as much humiliation to Brad Franklin as the sight of his eldest son. A product of Brad's first marriage, Vince was the image of his mother, Lila Crawford, and this alone was enough to stir painful memories. Lila had been as promiscuous and selfish as she had been pretty, but Brad had been young and in love. He had not discovered his wife's self-centered nature until after they were wed—and then it was too late.

Brad had remained firm in his convictions after their marriage. He had refused to overlook Lila's flirtations and involvements, demanding that she become the wife she had promised in her vows to be. So it was that less than a year after Vince's birth, Lila divorced her husband, took her baby, and ran away with a gambler from Natchez. All of Brad's attempts to reclaim his son had failed. He had seen Vince only a half-dozen times after Lila's departure, and never for more than a few moments. Then, three years after Brad's marriage to Amy Rocklin, he had received word of Lila's death. Hoping to be at last reunited with his son, he had taken five-year-old Vince into his home—but by then the boy was totally spoiled and as selfish as his mother. It hadn't been long before Vince's half brother and half sister, and his father, had little to do with the boy.

Now, staring with distaste in the direction Vince had gone, Brad shook his head again. "Never mind, Father," Rachel said with a smile. She gave his collar a slight pull and said, "My, you look dashing! Doesn't he, Mother? And look at you, in that new dress!"

Amy Franklin, the only daughter of Thomas Rocklin, was not really a beautiful woman, but she made people think she was. She was tall and dark like her father, and her fine dark eyes were her best feature. She smiled indul-

gently at her daughter. "Nobody looks at old women at weddings, Rachel. Let's go take our seats before somebody else gets them."

"Not much danger of that," Brad said, holding the door open, then following the two women inside. "Sam Reed has got this wedding planned down to the last bouquet. I think you have to have a pass from him to even get in the church."

An usher met them, saying, "This way, sir," and led them to their seats. When they were situated, Rachel said, "Isn't it lovely? I've never seen so many flowers!"

"Too bad the bride can't see them, isn't it?" Brad whispered.

"She can smell them," Rachel said. "And she's gone over every one, I do think, touching them."

"A strange thing—for Dent to marry her," Rachel's father said thoughtfully. "We all thought it'd be that Yankee girl, Deborah Steele, walking down the aisle with that boy." He gave a restless shake to his shoulders, adding, "I guess Dent thought a blind woman wouldn't mind the way he looks with all the scars."

Though he sounded cold, Maj. Franklin was merely voicing what many others had thought. Dent Rocklin had been one of the most handsome men in the city of Richmond, the object of many women's devotion. But a terrible saber cut on his face, which he had received at the battle of Manassas, had left him with a ghastly scar. It was, perhaps, natural that some would leap to the conclusion that he would marry someone such as Raimey Reed, who was lovely, but totally blind.

Rachel shook her head firmly. "No, Daddy, it's not like that. They're really in love. I even heard Dent say that Raimey was the most wonderful gift God has ever given him. If I ever got a husband, I'd want him to love me as much as Dent loves Raimey." Then she said quickly, as if to cover up a slip, "But here I am, the spinster of Lindwood, talking about a husband, just like all the old maids."

"I wish you'd stop calling yourself that ridiculous name, Rachel!" A quick flash of anger flared in Amy Franklin's eyes, and she added, "You could have been married long ago. There are a lot of young men around."

"Lots of gophers and jackrabbits around, too."

"Oh, you drive me mad, Rachel!" her mother said, then lifted her head. "Look, it's starting!"

The organ began to whisper, then grew louder as the members of the wedding party began the old ritual. As it went on, Rachel felt tears gathering in her eyes despite herself. Angrily she blinked them away, hoping no one had seen her. She hated how easily she was moved to tears—though she seldom let them be seen. Long ago she had decided to keep a tight rein on her emotions. Usually she succeeded, but there were times when she could not stem the tide. It never ceased to shame her that she was a young woman who constantly struggled with her emotions. She had been taught from an early age that God had created her as she was, giving her gifts and characteristics that were special to her. Even so, she envied women who were always cool and stately, like her great-aunt Marianne Bristol and her own mother. *I won't cry!* she thought fiercely as the wedding proceeded, but when Dent came out accompanied by his best man—his identical twin, David—she could not ignore the pang of pity that stabbed at her.

Dent and David had always been handsome. Now, as Dent stood with his scarred face turned toward the congregation and waited for his bride, everyone could see the full extent of his injury—and there stood David as a graphic reminder of what Lt. Denton Rocklin once had looked like.

Since Dent's injury, Rachel had instinctively avoided staring at her cousin's scarred face, not wanting to hurt him. Now that he could not see her, though, she lifted her eyes and took in the magnitude of the damage. The cut had caused Dent's left eye to droop, giving him a sinister appearance; the scar pulled the side of his mouth to

the left, which only added to that impression. Rachel could not help but glance at David, noting the firm lines of his face—and then she could look no more.

Then, suddenly, the organ began to swell in volume, and Rev. Jeremiah Irons gave a signal with his hand, bringing the congregation to their feet. Rachel turned to see Raimy, her hand resting on her father's arm, coming down the aisle, a vision of loveliness all in white. A smile was on her lips and her blue eyes were clear, fixed in front of her. She moved with such confidence that it would never have occurred to someone who was seeing her for the first time that she was blind.

As she took her place in front of Irons, her father stepped back, and at once she reached out and put her hand on Dent's arm. *She knew he'd be there*, Rachel thought. *She's always sure he'll be there.* The thought pleased her, bringing a softness to her lips. *That's what love is—just knowing that the one you love will always be there! Oh, heavenly Father, that's the kind of love I want.*

Then she listened as Irons read the familiar words and as Dent and Raimy spoke their vows, pledging themselves to God and to each other. It was quiet and solemn, and their words seemed to hang in the air like the notes of an organ heard from far away.

Finally the ceremony was over, and the Franklins rose. "Well, let's go to the reception," Rachel's father said. "Reed's reserved the ballroom at the Elliot Hotel. It's going to be a dandy." Just then, Rachel glanced up toward the balcony and saw Mark Rocklin sitting there, holding Vince in place with an iron authority. Her father, following her glance, frowned. "I'm glad Mark's keeping a tight rein on him. He's done enough to humiliate this family!"

The Elliot Hotel was not the largest hotel in Richmond, but it was the most elaborate and the most expensive. The ballroom was decorated with white banners, which picked up the gleam of light thrown by the glittering chandeliers. The dresses of the women added

splashes of color to the crowd, and the gray uniforms of many officers, with their gleaming black boots and gold buttons, gave a final touch of stylishness.

Long tables filled with meats, appetizers, candies, and cakes lined one wall, while other tables held crystal bowls of pink punch. The crowd was in a festive mood, and the air was filled with the sound of laughter and the hum of half a hundred conversations. A group of men had gathered in one section of the room, talking about things other than the weather—hunting, crops, horses, and especially the war. Maj. Brad Franklin and Col. James Benton of the Richmond Grays were there in uniform. Clay Rocklin, Thomas's son and Amy's brother, was also in the Grays. However, as a sergeant he had chosen to wear a brown suit, saying, "If I wore a uniform, I'd spend the whole time saluting."

Capt. Taylor Dewitt, also a member of Clay's company—and one of Clay's oldest friends—was there, too. The two of them stood off to one side, drinking punch while Col. Benton spoke of the battle of Bull Run. Most of the soldiers there had been in that battle, and they had not tired of talking of the victory.

"I tell you, the Yankees are whipped!" Benton declared. He was a tall, impressive figure of a man, with white hair and a florid face. "We sent 'em scurrying back to Washington with their tails between their legs!"

It was a common view, spoken every day by many Southerners. They gleefully recounted "the sprightly running" of the Federals as they fled to Washington, and many of the young Confederate soldiers were grieved that it seemed probable that they would never have a chance to see a battle. Capt. Dewitt just shook his head. "With all respects, sir, I think we'll be seeing a lot more action." Taylor was forty, one year younger than Clay Rocklin. He had a lean pale face, light blue eyes, and a clear mind that could not help analyzing things. Now he added, "You saw how they fought, Colonel. I know they broke and ran, but there were a couple of times when we

were in about as bad a shape as the Yankees. It could have gone the other way if Smith and Elzey hadn't come at just the right moment."

"Oh, come now, Dewitt! I don't see that at all!" The speaker was Simon Duvall, a thin, dark-skinned man in his late thirties. His French heritage was revealed in his thin face, which he adorned with a narrow black moustache, and a pair of dark eyes that grew hot when anger took him—not a rare thing. He had fought four duels, killing one man, and his temper was a frightful thing when aroused. Now, however, he was merely arguing mildly, adding, "Why, the entire Army of the Potomac is huddled in Washington, and Lincoln fired McDowell and put McClellan in charge."

"I think President Davis was right," Clay said suddenly. He was one of the Black Rocklins, with raven hair, olive skin, and dark eyes. He was six feet two, lean and muscular, and had a temper that few men cared to challenge. His youth had been stormy, but after being away from home for many years, and after encountering the one who had loved him no matter how far he had fallen into degradation, he had returned to try to pick up his life. Sadly, he had been met with great opposition from his children, particularly from Dent, who seemed to burn with resentment toward his father. Still, Clay continued in his efforts to become the kind of man and father he believed God wanted him to be.

For his own reasons, Clay had long opposed the war, and his views had made him an unpopular man. Even so, at the last moment he had joined the Grays as a private. He had won honor by leading a charge in a crucial battle—but more important to Clay than the honor he earned was the fact that the charge had saved Dent's life. Through a course of events following, Clay and Dent had finally reconciled.

"What did the president want to do, Clay?"

The voice came from his right, and Clay turned to see that Vince Franklin, having escaped his great-uncle,

had joined the group. Vince was a fine-looking man of twenty-four, with crisply curling brown hair that he wore long and a neat, full beard of the same texture. The beard covered the lower part of his face, giving him a cavalier appearance. He wore an expensive suit of light gray, and the shining boots on his feet cost as much as a good horse. He had a glass in his hand, and everyone in the group could tell by the redness in Vince's deep-set, wide-spaced brown eyes that the glass held more than the harmless punch being served by the ladies at the table.

Clay shrugged his shoulders, saying, "When the Federals ran, President Davis wanted to follow them and take Washington."

"By Harry!" Brad Franklin cried. "We ought to have listened to Davis!"

Clay said thoughtfully, "We may never have another chance like that . . . but we were about as worn down from the battle as the enemy. And they had plenty of fresh reinforcements. I don't think we would have been successful."

Vince Franklin took a drink from the glass in his hand, then grinned rashly. "Why, that would have been a tragedy! If we had taken Washington, the game would be over."

"Game?" Brad Franklin stared at his son with obvious displeasure. "This war is no game, Vince!"

"Looks like it to me! Dressing up in uniforms and playing soldier!"

Vince Franklin could not have made a more insulting remark to a more hostile audience. All of those gathered, in one way or another, were pledging their homes and their hearts in the war. Some of those present had lost family members; all of them had lost close friends at Manassas. The sudden enmity of everyone's glances would have been warning enough to most men, but Vince Franklin seemed to court the kind of encounters that others would do their best to avoid.

Clay saw Vince's father turn pale with anger, but it was Simon Duvall who answered the young man's rash words. "We fight for the honor of our country, Franklin, and I question the courage of any man who stays at home and lets other men do his fighting."

His words made many of the men blink, for it was the equivalent of a challenge. If Duvall had said such a thing to any other man in the group, there would have been a meeting at dawn with pistols. Duvall's smooth face was turned toward Vince, and Clay saw there was a pleasure in his dark eyes. *He loves this!* Clay thought, and disgust ran through him at the thought that any man could find gratification in killing another.

But Vince Franklin felt only amusement at the thought of engaging in a duel over words. He grinned at Duvall, saying, "Why, Simon, somebody has to stay at home and comfort the women while their husbands are away fighting for the Cause."

Duvall sucked in a quick breath, his dark face growing pale, and those gathered around the two waited for his response. Clay glanced at Taylor, and he could tell from the look in his friend's eyes that they shared the same thought: *Duvall already suspects that Vince has been having an affair with his wife—and he knows that every man here is aware of his suspicions.* Black anger leaped into Duvall's eyes and he stepped forward, but before he could strike Vince, the younger man wheeled and walked away, saying, "I'm not a fool, Duvall. Fight your duels with men who have no brains!"

Duvall stood there, his eyes boring into Vince's back, then he turned and stalked away without a word, his body rigid.

For a moment there was silence in the room. Then Col. Benton said, "Vince is a fool, Brad," then turned and left. The others, finding the situation most unpleasant, moved away, leaving Clay and his brother-in-law alone.

"Benton is right, Clay," Brad said bitterly. "Why did Vince come here? His greatest delight seems to be spoil-

ing things for others." When Clay remained silent, he added, "His mother was like that, too."

It was the most revealing thing Brad Franklin had ever said to Clay about his first marriage. It had been a bitter affair for Franklin, a stormy union that had left deep scars on the man. But his second marriage to Amy, Clay's only sister, had been happy. Their children, Grant, Rachel, and Les, were all good youngsters, taking after their mother to a large extent. With a happy and stable home, Brad had had high hopes for Vince when he brought him into his family. But the boy only seemed to grow more wild, undisciplined, and cruel, doing all he could to go his own reckless way. It had been a bitter pill for everyone involved.

Amy, who had loved the wild boy from the first time he entered her home, had prayed for him every day and had done her best to show him she cared for him. But Vince would have none of it. As the years passed, he rebuffed any advances from Amy or his half sister or half brothers and treated his father with impudence. By the time he left home, he had successfully alienated them all. To this day he made no attempt to become a part of the family, seeming instead to enjoy tormenting those who should have been the closest to him.

The reason he was able to torment them so effectively, Clay understood, was partly because of the will that Hiram Franklin, Brad's father, had left. Brad and his father had never gotten along. In Hiram Franklin's opinion, his son was too wild and undisciplined to amount to any good. And so he had cut Brad out of his will, favoring instead his firstborn grandson, Vince. And the will provided for Brad's oldest son in a generous way—a certain amount each year until his twenty-fifth birthday, when he would receive the bulk of the inheritance—and the bulk of the control over Lindwood.

During the years since Vince had left Lindwood, he had done as he pleased and, with plenty of money, he found others to go along with him. He had an unsavory

reputation as a womanizer and, since his return, his drinking and gambling habits were no secret to anyone in the county.

Clay drew a deep breath, then said, "Duvall's a dangerous man to cross, Brad. Better try to talk to Vince."

"He's not listened to me for years, Clay. Or to anyone else, for that matter."

The two men were not the only ones interested in Vince Franklin. Even as they were talking, the young Franklin was the subject of yet another conversation. Rachel had been serving punch but took a break to walk around the room with Leighton Semmes. Semmes had spoken of Vince's untimely appearance, saying, "That brother of yours seems to have little in the way of manners, Rachel." A lean man of twenty-six, with dark hair and eyes, Leighton had fine manners and wore the latest fashions, and there was an ease in him that Rachel knew had been developed by his pursuit of women. Semmes, she knew, saw the relationship between the sexes as a game. She liked the man but knew that it was not wise to encourage his interest, for he had broken the hearts of at least two other young women.

"I can't explain Vince, Leighton," she admitted, shrugging. "He's my half brother, but I have no idea what makes him act the way he does."

Semmes studied her, admiration in his dark eyes. He took in the picture she made: a tall young woman with a wealth of honey-colored hair and a pair of blue-green eyes that matched her silk emerald dress. Her eyes were strange, unique; almond-shaped and very large, with thick lashes. As he gazed at her, Semmes thought there was something almost sultry about them, though the girl herself was not aware of that. She had a squarish face, with a wide mouth and a cleft chin, which Semmes knew she hated. Still, it gave her a striking look, one that seemed to suggest that this was a young woman who kept a passionate streak under firm control, covering it with a rather pointed wit. The fact that

she called herself the spinster of Lindwood was a sample of that wit, for no woman looked less like a spinster than Rachel Franklin.

Semmes had played a game with her, drawn by her beauty and wit, but sensing that if he tried to press his luck, she would mock him. Now he said, "Your father spoils him, I think. Always has."

"No," Rachel said thoughtfully, "Vince spoils himself. He has never needed Father, you know, because he has money of his own." Then she added with a quirk of a smile, "Did you know the Bible says, 'Money answereth all things'? That's in Ecclesiastes 10:19."

"I didn't know that was in the Bible," Semmes said, "but I believe it. Nothing is stronger than money."

"You're wrong about that, Leighton," Rachel said at once. "Love is stronger than anything in the world."

"You are fortunate, then, for you're made for love, Rachel."

She laughed at the eager look on his face, then shook her head, her heavy mane of hair sweeping across her back. "Never mind all that, Leighton. I know that look. You've used it on too many of my friends. They've all warned me about you!"

"It's not fair!" Semmes exclaimed. "A man smiles at a woman, and she thinks it's a proposal of marriage." He spoke quickly, wanting her to know what he believed. "Love is important, Rachel, but I've never understood the rules. I like women, and some of them have seemed to like me, but they want to draw lines that I can't fathom."

"Oh, you understand the rules well enough, Leighton," Rachel answered. "You just don't like them."

Semmes knew she was laughing at him, which pleased him in a way. Of all the women he had known, only this one could hold him at arm's length and make him almost enjoy it. "You know me too well, Rachel." He smiled. "Maybe you'll be able to reform me."

"I think that would be a difficult job, Mr. Semmes." Rachel's eyes laughed up at him and she decided to change

the subject. He was, quite simply, too attractive—and Rachel had begun to think of him far too often. This troubled her greatly, for playing at love with Leighton Semmes was like playing with live ammunition. “Let’s go congratulate the bride and groom.”

“Has anyone heard about the newlyweds? It’s been two weeks now. I hope they’re still together.”

Rachel smiled at Grant, knowing that her brother loved to tease her. He was wearing his uniform and looked very handsome, and, as the carriage rolled along the dusty road toward Richmond, Rachel was strangely happy. “I expect Dent’s worked all the foolishness out of Raimy by now,” she said, teasingly. “You know how they say a woman needs a strong hand now and then.”

Grant laughed aloud at the idea. “I’d like to see the man who’d have the nerve to try such things with *you*, Sister! You’d give him a thrashing!” He looked at her with real affection, for there was a close bond between the two. He was twenty-one, only two years older than she, and they had always shared things. While he had the fair skin and reddish blond hair of his father, his even temper was that of his mother. Now he added, “But if you marry Semmes, he might be a handful.”

“I’ll never marry Leighton. He’s too much in love with somebody else.”

“Who is that?”

“Himself, of course.” Rachel laughed at the expression on Grant’s face, then sobered. “I’ll just keep on being the spinster of Lindwood, Grant. It’s safer that way.”

“Aw, Rachel, you can’t live in a cave and think small,” Grant protested. “Marriage works out fine for some. Look at our folks.”

“Yes, but look at Uncle Clay and Aunt Ellen.” Both of them knew that their uncle’s marriage to Ellen Benton had been so stormy that Clay now lived in a summer house on his plantation, Gracefield, to avoid contact with his wife. Ellen, on the other hand, spent most of her

time in Richmond, flirting and spending money—when she had it. Rachel, who liked her uncle very much, was turned gloomy by the thought of their troubles and fell silent.

When they pulled up at the livery stable, Grant helped Rachel down, then said, "Let's go get something to eat." She agreed, and they went to French's Restaurant and had fresh veal and corn bread. While they ate, Grant spoke little of the plantation, for it was Les, the younger brother, who was a natural farmer. Grant had been at Manassas, and his whole mind was on the war. He was a second lieutenant in D Company.

Later, as they left the restaurant, Rachel said, "It'll all be over soon, I pray. I hate this war."

Grant said stubbornly, "No, Sister, it won't be—"

"Grant! Hey, Grant!" The two Franklins turned to see their younger brother, Les, dash up and stand before them. His face was flushed and hot anger lit his blue eyes. "It's Vince and Simon Duvall!" he said, speaking so fast he was hard to understand. "Come on, Grant!"

"You wait here," Grant said to Rachel, but as he and Les raced down the street, she grabbed up her skirts and flew after them. When she turned the corner, she saw a crowd of people gathered around Vince and Duvall, who were standing in an open space. There had been an argument, she saw, for Duvall's face was livid.

"Stay away from me, Duvall!" Vince was saying. His eyes, as usual, were red rimmed from drink. As he tried to move away, Duvall reached out and caught him, whirling him around. Though Duvall was much smaller, he was wiry and strong.

"You've sullied my wife's name in public," he snarled in fury, "and now you're going to answer for it!"

Vince, Rachel saw, was pale as paper; fear had washed all the color from his face. He jerked his arm free and wheeled to move away, but Duvall stepped to a buggy tied to the rail, jerked a whip from the socket, then, in one motion, lifted it and brought it down on Vince. It

curled around his neck, and when Duvall gave it a pull, Vince was stopped as if he'd run into a wall.

Rachel moved to stand beside Grant, who said, "I've got to stop this."

"Stay out of it!" Rachel took her brother's arm and held him tightly. "You know what kind of man Duvall is! He's likely to shoot anyone who interferes!"

Duvall struck Vince three times, then cried out, "Now will you fight?"

Vince, a red mark from the whip across his brow, gave a sob and broke into a run, pushing men aside. It was a disgusting thing to see, and Grant turned away, shaking his head. "He'll have to leave the country!" he said in a low voice.

Duvall shouted, "You'd better start wearing a gun, Franklin! Next time I see you, I'll kill you!" He tossed the whip down and walked stiffly down the street.

"He'll do it, too," Grant said to his brother and sister as the crowd broke into an excited jumble of voices. "Come on, let's go home."

The three of them got into the buggy, aware that people were staring at them. On the way home, Les said bitterly, "I wouldn't let a man do that to me!"

Grant shrugged. "Vince knew what Duvall was like. He should have left the man's wife alone."

"Do you think he had an affair with Rose?" Rachel asked.

"Doesn't matter much, does it? Duvall will kill him whether he did or not."

They arrived at Lindwood to find that their father was gone with his unit. Even so, they had to tell their mother what had happened. She said nothing at first, then remarked, "We need to get word to your father. Les, will you go tell him?"

"Let's both go," Grant said, and the two got their horses and left. All afternoon Rachel thought of the ugly scene, and even after she went to bed that night, it kept coming back.

Father, she prayed silently, feeling helpless, *please do something about Vince.*

Finally she got up, put on her robe, and went to the kitchen. She was drinking a cup of warm milk when suddenly Vince came through the door, a suitcase in his hand. He was obviously leaving and was shocked to see Rachel, so he stood there uncertainly.

"Well, I guess you're happy about all this," he snapped hatefully.

"No, I'm not," she answered quietly. "Are you running away?" Rachel looked at the suitcase he held in one hand and the small bag in the other.

He stared at her as if she had said something stupid. "Running away? Of course I'm running away! Did you think I'd stay around and let that fool of a duelist kill me?"

Rachel studied Vince, then asked, "Where will you go?"

"I'm taking a little ocean voyage," he said with a nod. "Been wanting to see more of the world. I'll let that hot-head cool off, then I'll come back."

"Duvall won't cool off," Rachel said, quiet certainty in her voice. "You can never come home."

"Maybe he'll get killed in this war. I certainly hope so!" He moved to the door, then something prompted him to turn. He stared at Rachel, then said, "Well, good-bye. I don't guess you'll miss me much, will you?"

"Not much, Vince," she said honestly. "We haven't been close, though I've tried since you've been back. You've never thought of anyone but yourself. I can't think of a worse way to live or a quicker way to become a miserable human being." His face darkened in anger as he listened, but Rachel went on. "I will be praying for you, though. And I wish you luck. I think you'll need it."

"Just you wait until I get control of this place, dear sister," he spat at her. "Then we'll see who's miserable!" Whirling, he left the room, and soon she heard him driving his carriage, whipping his horse to a full run down the drive.

Rachel put out the lamp and left the kitchen, disturbed by the scene. She had no love for Vince—he had not opened himself to it—but he was still a part of her family . . . and as the sound of hoofbeats grew dim, a bleak sorrow came to her.