



For John and Liberty

By Lindsey Pearce

Sunlight crept through the small opening between canvas and earth into the tent, arousing its occupants. My eyes blinked open, and my internal clock told me it was just past dawn. I stretched, got dressed in my uniform, and crawled out of the tent with a few of my fellow soldiers behind me.

“Mornin’, Isaac.” I turned around to see another soldier who I instantly recognized. It was my best friend, John Williams. We had known each other since we were very little. He had dirty blonde hair that looked like it had been tousled constantly and pale blue eyes. He was taller than me, too, probably about three inches taller, and I had to look up to meet his eyes.

“Good morning, John,” I replied to him. I stood up and quickly dusted off the pants of my Confederate uniform. I hated that uniform. When the war broke out, my father shipped me away from Georgia to the Confederate army. Honestly, I thought that slavery should be banned, but how would I be able to tell my father?

“Well, come on, already. Colonel Cooper said that he has a strategy to knock those Union soldiers away,” John said. Honestly I hoped the Union would win. We went towards the center of camp, where all the other soldiers had gathered, save for the Colonel. Finally, Cooper showed up. I really hated how he had a thing for showing up at either the last second, or late.

He stood before us, regal like a king, and spoke. “I have created a plan,” he began. I rolled my eyes slightly. He began every strategy like that. “We will sneak up on Chief Opothleyahola, and either compel him to submit or drive him and his party out of the country!” Most of the soldiers cheered. Personally, I thought Cooper was barking mad. John smiled at me.

“Pretty good idea, eh, Isaac?” he said.

“Yeah, I guess.”

“I can’t wait!” John exclaimed. “What about you?”

I bit my lip slightly. “I’m not sure,” I said. “I don’t like to kill.”



John's face softened. "I know. Neither do I. But I have to. Mom and Virginia need me to win this for them." I smiled up at him. He was lucky. He hadn't been forced to come. He chose to so he could protect his mother and younger sister, Ginny. He didn't have a dad or slaves; he might not have even believed in the Confederate cause. I had never asked. He smiled back and gave my light brown hair a quick tousle.

"Let's go," he said.

Later that night, I wrote in my journal.

November 15, 1861.

Colonel Cooper led us on a charge to Chief Opothleyahola's camp. I don't know if I've mentioned him before, but he's a big time Indian chief who has gathered runaway slaves, free blacks, Chickasaws, and Seminoles, along with a few Unionists. So we went there, but it was empty. Colonel Cooper said that we will find them and destroy them. I don't know how we will, but he swears we can, and we will.

First Lieutenant Isaac Morrison

For the next three days, nothing happened. It was rather boring. Eat, patrol, horseback, sleep, repeat. I was getting really bored. Then, on the fourth day, something exciting happened.

I had just finished tying up Ness, my golden bay stallion. I stroked his mane gently. He was calm. Then, I heard a commotion. I turned and ran to the center of camp. Apparently, some of the troops had found a few of Opothleyahola's soldiers, and they were our prisoners. I jogged over to John.

"Hey, Isaac," he whispered.

"Hi, John," I whispered back. We stopped talking completely as Cooper walked in and studied the prisoners carefully.

"So, you are part of Opothleyahola's troops?" the Colonel asked.

"Yes." One of them spat.

"So where is he hiding?" Cooper glared at the one that had spoken. He glared back. The other prisoner trembled and soon cracked.

"At the Red Fork of the Arkansas River!" he choked out. Cooper smiled almost sinisterly.



“Wonderful. Captain Williams!”

John straightened. “Sir!”

“Prepare the cavalry,” Cooper commanded.

“Yes, sir!” The members of the cavalry, including John and myself, ran to our horses, saddled, and mounted.

We made our way to the Red Fork.

When we got there, we found the camp deserted. I looked over to John. One nice thing about being in the cavalry was that Ness was taller than John’s horse, so I could look my best friend in the eye when we rode.

“Not again!” I sighed. John sighed, too, and then turned back towards the camp. He pointed at something.

“A straggler!” he shouted. “Come on, let’s move!” John and I galloped after the straggler and followed them towards a tree line. I suddenly saw a moving shadow. Then another. There were people just behind the tree line. My eyes widened.

“John, wait!” I was too late. I heard gunshots, and John clutched his chest and began to fall. “John!” I exclaimed in horror. I jumped off Ness, ignoring the shots around me, and caught my best friend before he hit the ground. His eyes fluttered open.

“John...” I moaned softly.

“Isaac...tell my mother and Ginny...I love them.” John’s eyes met mine for a second. Mine began to fill with tears.

“John, you can’t go!” I cried.

John chuckled slightly. “You’re still a crybaby, Isaac. Don’t forget, you will always be my best friend...and you were the best Lieutenant a guy could ask for,” he groaned softly, and his eyes fluttered closed.

“John,” I choked. “John!” I burst into tears, holding the dead body of my best friend. I didn’t move, I just held him limply in my arms and choked out silent cries. My best friend was dead, and he would never see his mother and sister ever again. I didn’t hear the Indian sneak up behind me. I didn’t know he was there until I was hit in the head. I fell to the side and blacked out, letting John’s body fall from my tight clutch as I fell.



When my eyes fluttered open again, I saw heavy canvas above me, sloping, and I knew I was in a tent. The back of my head hurt, and I groaned.

“Rose, he’s awake,” a voice across the tent called. I turned and saw a boy with messy, unkempt reddish brown hair and bright blue eyes lying on a cot. He was in a blue Union uniform and was looking at me quizzically. I groaned and sat up, propping myself on my elbows. A young woman then walked in. She had dark brown hair and dark eyes. She must’ve been part Indian. She smiled at me.

“Good, you’re awake. How’re you feeling?” she asked nicely.

“My head hurts,” I groaned, slightly sounding bitter.

“Yeah. You got hit pretty hard. Don’t worry, though. The pain should go away soon.”

“Where am I?” I asked.

“In the camp of Opothleyahola,” the girl replied. I gasped. “Don’t worry, we won’t kill you. We just wanted to find out about the Confederate Army’s next move. But Chief Opothleyahola can tell you later. I’m Rose, by the way, and the boy over there is Luke.” I smiled and nodded and saw another cot not far away with a still body that had a sheet over it. I choked up again.

Luke looked over at where I was looking. “Do you know him?” he asked.

“His name was Captain John Williams, and he was my best friend,” I whispered, close to tears again.

“I’m sorry,” Rose said, putting a hand on my shoulder. I bent my head, looking towards my lap. “We’ll bury him,” she went on.

“Why? He was in the Confederacy, and so am I. Why would you?”

“Because we are all Americans. And it doesn’t matter that you fought against us, and one of my brothers spilled your friend’s blood. Because, you are my brother, too,” Rose replied. I nodded numbly.

“What of my horse?”

“We captured both horses with you.”

I nodded. “The bay stallion is mine. As for the chestnut, do whatever you please. He was John’s.”

“May...I ride him?” Luke asked. I turned to him. “My horse was killed underneath me, and I haven’t one. So may I ride him?”

I smiled. Luke was a cavalry member, too. John would want this. “Sure. I don’t see any harm in it.”



“What’s his name?”

“Well, John named him ‘Walnut,’” I replied.

All of us burst into laughter. “Walnut?” Luke asked between laughs.

“Yeah. I told John it was a stupid name, but he didn’t believe me.”

“Well, I’m changing it.” Luke thought a moment and finally decided. “Tex.”

“Tex?”

“I’m from Texas. My father moved from Missouri, my mother from Massachusetts, and they met there, got married and had me.”

“It’s definitely better than Walnut,” I said. Luke and Rose nodded. Then, an Indian walked in.

“Chief Opothleyahola wants to see you, Confederate,” he said and led me to a different tent. Inside it was the man who I could only presume to be Opothleyahola.

“What has the Confederate Army planned?” he asked me.

“I-I’m not sure. Cooper makes up plans on the fly, so you really never know until the day before, or maybe only fifteen minutes before.”

“Hm. What’s your name, boy?”

“F-First Lieutenant Isaac Morrison, sir,” I said. “I’m in the cavalry.”

“Why are you a Confederate?”

“My-my father forced me to join. I honestly don’t believe in the Confederate cause. I think slavery should be banned,” I replied truthfully. Opothleyahola was silent for a bit longer, and then he finally spoke again.

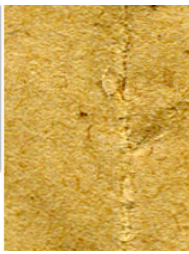
“Then would you join my troops? Serve in the cavalry? My captain was killed in the fight, so I need a new one.”

I gaped a bit, but then closed my mouth and nodded. “I do have one request, sir,” I said.

“Yes, Captain Morrison?” he asked. Captain Morrison. I liked the way that sounded.

“My best friend, John Williams, was killed, too. I only ask to see him put to rest,” I answered.

Opothleyahola nodded. “I think that could be arranged,” he said. I smiled and nodded.



November 20, 1861.

I'm a Union soldier now. Opothleyahola accepted me into his troops after the battle yesterday went awry. John is dead now. I buried him today as the sun set on a hill that faces west. My new friends, Rose and Luke, helped me bury him. Luke is in the cavalry, too, and I gave him John's horse. Luke changed his name from "Walnut" to "Tex." I prefer Tex. Walnut sounds like the name a first grader would give their dog.

Opothleyahola is really nice so far. He gave me a place in his troops, as captain over the cavalry. That means I can boss Sergeant Major Luke Strine all I want. Another thing Opothleyahola did, even though he wasn't in command of John, was upgrade him by two ranks. His tombstone reads Colonel John Nathaniel Williams, born April 13, 1844, and died November 19, 1861. He was just seventeen years old.

Overall, today was a good day. Today, I removed my Confederate uniform for the last time. I threw it into the campfire and watched it burn. Tomorrow, instead of brown, I'm going to wear blue. The blue Union Uniform.

Captain Isaac Morrison

The next morning, I got my breakfast and sat beside Luke. Another soldier sat beside me. He had somewhat messily styled dark brown hair and pale blue eyes, like icy rivers. He smiled.

"Hey, you're the former Confederate, right?" I nodded. "I'm Jack. Captain Jack Hart, to be exact, but just call me Jack." He held out his hand.

I shook it. "Hello, Jack. I'm Captain Isaac Morrison, but just call me Isaac."

The rest of the day I spent mainly getting used to being captain of the cavalry, and getting to know the other soldiers better. I found out that Rose and Luke share a tent. I asked if it was because they were siblings, but Jack told me that no one is really sure why. Quite a bit of time passed before anything really happened.





On December 9, there was finally some action. We had been fleeing Cooper and got to a small creek called Bird Creek. The Confederates were planning on attacking us, and Opothleyahola knew that. We got to this place called Horseshoe Bend, and Opothleyahola placed us strategically where we'd be strong. Finally, the Confederates attacked. We fought back, hard. As I raced beside Luke towards the army, I almost saw John instead of Luke. Then, I heard a gunshot, and Luke grabbed his back near his stomach area.

"Luke!" I shouted. I caught him and looked at his injury. It didn't look life threatening, but I needed a better look. I began to unbutton his shirt, and he squeaked slightly.

"Maybe Rose should do that," he said.

"Hang on, just let me see." It took a bit, but finally, I pulled his shirt off. I sighed in relief. "Don't worry, Luke. You'll be all right." I turned him so I could look him in the eye, but I gasped. Luke squeaked again, grabbed the shirt, and covered his chest area. My eyes widened. I had been looking at a female body.

"Oh my gosh. You're a girl?" I gasped.

"Please don't tell," Luke cried. I sighed and let her put her shirt back on.

"We're going to Rose. Then you better tell me what exactly is going on." I helped Luke onto Ness, climbed on in front of her, and started back to camp having Tex follow us. I gripped the reins so tight that my knuckles turned white.

We got to the medical tent and went straight to Rose. She saw me helping Luke and gasped.

"What happened?" she asked.

"Luke was shot in the back. I don't think it's fatal." Rose nodded and helped Luke to a cot, then she turned to me.

"I can take care of this," she said.

I closed the tent opening and shook my head. "She owes me an explanation," I said.

"She?" Rose asked.

I glared at her slightly and nodded. "I found out about Luke," I explained. Rose blanched but went over to Luke and started dressing the wound. I sat down nearby the cot.

"So? Why are you pretending to be a boy and fight in the army? And what's your real name?" I said.



“My...my name is Liberty,” she replied. “Liberty Matilda Strine.” She paused a bit and then continued. “My mother died when I was born, and my father died while fighting for the Union. I had nowhere to go, so I cut my hair and changed my first name and joined the Union Army. One thing I know how to do was ride a horse, and firing a gun really isn’t that hard. I made friends with a female medic, and she kept my secret. Then I was sent to Indian Territory, and I panicked. Then I met Rose. She promised to keep my secret, too. And then you came along...” she squeaked a bit. “Please don’t tell.”

I looked at her and smiled softly. “I won’t,” I told her. “I promise. Don’t worry, Liberty. Your secret’s safe with me.” Liberty met my gaze and smiled.

“Thanks, Isaac,” she said. I smiled back.

“Don’t worry about it,” I replied. Rose finished cleaning and binding the wound, and Liberty sat up. She was beaming.

“Seriously. Thanks a lot,” she said. I grinned even wider.

December 9, 1861.

Today, we went into a huge fight, and Luke got injured. That’s when I found out that Luke is actually a girl named Liberty. She told me all about her becoming a soldier in the Union Army, and before that. The poor girl doesn’t have any family. Her own father was killed in this war. But she’s in danger here. This is no place for a girl. I don’t care what she feels. She needs to go. She can’t stay here.

Captain Isaac Morrison



December 25, 1861.

Today, we had a party. It's Christmas, after all. We deserved to celebrate. It was awesome. There was singing, a huge roaring campfire, and whiskey. There was this huge fight that virtually everyone participated in just to get some of that sweet drink. I managed to get a lot of it and got drunk. Only the Indian girls and Liberty stayed back.

After it was over, we went off to get some sleep. I escorted Rose and Liberty to their tent. Rose went inside, and Liberty started to follow, but I grabbed her and kissed her, very sloppily. Thank goodness no one else was around. Liberty surprised me though. She didn't pull away, even though it was obvious I was drunk. She even kissed me back. After a minute, though, she slapped me, and I recovered my senses. I instantly ran back to my tent. I'm scared of what Liberty will do to me tomorrow.

Captain Isaac Morrison

I crawled out of my tent as dawn crept into the camp. I was very scared. What was Liberty going to say? I quickly went over to her tent and saw her come out. No one else was near, so I went up to her.

"Liberty...about last night...sorry. I was drunk."

"You idiot," Liberty replied, smacking me. "I know you were. But that doesn't mean I can't enjoy your stupidity."

"You...liked kissing me?" I asked.

"Of course. I only slapped you to get you back to normal before you did anything else, but I didn't want you to run off."

Tentatively, I stepped closer to her. I smiled. She was just my height, not taller, not shorter. I hugged her gently and kissed her again. It was shorter than last night's but that was okay. We broke apart and smiled.

"Let's go get breakfast," Liberty said. I nodded, and we went and got our rations. We sat down and ate, and Jack joined us.

"Hey, Isaac. Luke. What's up?"

"Nothing, really. Recovered from that party?" Liberty asked.



“Yeah. And you?”

“I tried to kiss Luke, I was so drunk. He slapped me back to senses, though,” I told him. Jack smiled and started laughing.

“You know, if one of you was a girl, you’d probably fall in love with each other,” he said. I smirked at the irony.

Then I heard a shout. “Confederates!” We gasped, put down our breakfast, and grabbed our rifles. There were about one thousand troops, but we fired at them, knocking several down. Beside me, Liberty hit a person. The Confederates kept coming, and we had to flee. Liberty and I climbed onto our horses and began to gallop. We went through underbrush, getting several scratches. Liberty looked behind us, and Tex ran into a root. He stumbled a bit, and Liberty fell off. She hit the ground hard, and her leg snapped, bending awkwardly.

“Luke!” I yelled, leaping off Ness. She was unconscious. I picked her up, set her on Ness, grabbed both Ness’ and Tex’s reins and began running. I didn’t stop until I found Rose.

We lost the fight. Opothleyahola was breaking up his troops, and I would be sent away. Liberty had broken her leg, and so she was told she would be sent home.

“But where will I go?” Liberty moaned softly. I looked at her and took her hand.

“Go to Savannah, Georgia. There’s a family there named Williams. Tell them I sent you, and you’ll be fine.”

“But, Isaac, what about you?” she asked.

“I’m going to continue fighting,” I told her.

“What if you don’t come back?” she cried.

I pulled her closer to me. “I’ll come back, I promise. I’ll see you again.” She wrapped her arms around me and buried her face in my shoulder. “I’ll come to Georgia, and I’ll get you. We can get married and have a family of our own,” I continued.

“Please come with me. I don’t want to be alone,” Liberty sobbed quietly.



“Take Tex with you. Wait for me, and I’ll come back.”

“Isaac, please,” she pleaded.

“I’ll see you soon, I promise.” Liberty broke away from me and began walking off. The next day, Liberty was sent to Georgia.

Liberty was walking through the unfamiliar streets of Savannah, and finally found the Williams’ house. She knocked on the door, and a girl with dirty blonde hair in ringlets and pale blue eyes answered the door.

“Yes?” she asked.

Liberty was nervous. “My name is Liberty Strine...Isaac Morrison sent me.”

“Oh, *you’re* Liberty. Isaac sent a letter to Mom about you. Come on in.” Liberty followed the girl. “My name’s Virginia, like the state.” Liberty nodded. Virginia went on. “Mom’s not here now, but she will be soon. But here’s the letter, Isaac wrote this part for you.”

Liberty took the paper from Ginny and began to read.

Dear Liberty,

I wrote this in advance, and I hope you get this. I want you to know that I still think of you. I already sent a letter to Ms. Williams. If you’re reading this, then that means that they let you in. Don’t worry about me, Liberty. I’ll be home soon. I promise it won’t be long until you see me again. All I have left to say is one thing. I love you, Liberty Strine.

Love,

Captain Isaac Morrison



It was July 20, 1863, in Savannah, Georgia. A young man, age nineteen, was walking towards a pretty house that most people recognized as the Williams'. A golden bay stallion was walking behind him. As they approached the house, a chestnut stallion whinnied, and the bay whinnied back. The man dropped the reins, and the bay ran to the chestnut. The man smiled and walked up the steps. Then, he knocked.

Inside, Liberty stood up from the breakfast table. "Who would visit this early?" she asked Mrs. Williams, who shrugged. Liberty sighed and walked to the door and heard Tex neigh. Another horse neighed back. Liberty was puzzled and continued to the door. She opened it and saw a young man with light brown hair and child-like green eyes. Her breath faltered.

The man only smiled. "I'm home, Liberty."

Liberty gasped for breath and then stepped closer to him and embraced him. "Isaac..." she breathed.

"I promised, remember?" Isaac whispered to her. He broke apart from her and took in her appearance. Her hair was shoulder length now, and she looked more delicate than when the two of them had been in Indian Territory.

"We...we were having breakfast. Come on." Liberty took Isaac's hand and led him in. As they entered the dining room, Mrs. Williams gasped.

"You're back," she said, giving him a gentle hug. Liberty turned to face him and smiled.

"Welcome home."

July 20, 1863.

I came home today. This is the last entry I'll ever write. I was finally relieved. We just finished a battle, and we won, so I was allowed to return home. In a few days, I'm planning to move to Boston with Liberty. We'll start a family there. I'm so glad to be with her again, that I'm not sure if I'll ever fall asleep. Rose and Jack moved to Boston already. I told Liberty that, and she agreed to the move.



I told Virginia and Mrs. Williams about John. They had already known, but it was more special to hear it from me. Apparently, since no one in the Confederacy found my body, my father thinks I'm dead. That means I'm free to start my own life. I can't wait to get started.

Captain Isaac Morrison

I closed the journal and set it on the bedside table. Then, I crawled under the sheets. This was it. A new part of my life has just begun. I would buy a new journal tomorrow, and write in it just like this one. I rested my head on the pillow and turned out the light.

I woke up the next day. It was dawn.