

Chapter 1

A Choice to Make

The steam from the engine engulfed the passengers at the Washington, D. C., train station. Women in bustles and men in uniform danced the arrival dance in the excitement of politics, greetings, and luggage. It was January 1861, a new year and a new president would be inaugurated in February.

Captain Andrew Browning gathered his trunk and waited on his horse, Stoneybrooke. He ran his hands through his auburn hair. It had been a long train ride from the West. He felt stiff, tired, and anxious about the gathering storm and his new appointment to the Army of the Potomac.

Maggie Strickland chatted excitedly, twirling while taking in all the busyness and swirl of the Capitol's rail station. The senator from Massachusetts and his aides flanked her. They watched her excited blue eyes and bouncing brown tresses. She danced on her toes to her full height in order to see everything over the crowd.

As she twirled, she saw the tall handsome captain as his beautiful gray horse was handed over to him. His uniform was crisp despite his long travel. He stroked the muzzle with care as he took the reins, and the horse responded with an excited shake of mane and tail. Maggie smiled at the beautiful horse and his owner.

“Who is that man?” she asked the senator.

“By rank, he looks to be a captain. Beyond that, I do not know. I’m sure, Maggie, we can find out, if it’s important to you,” answered an aide.

Maggie blushed. “Sir, I was merely curious. You know political lobbyists; we’re curious about everything. I was merely looking over the crowd.”

The senator’s aide laughed a short guffaw. Maggie glared at him. Then she stalked off in the direction of the captain and his horse. The senator’s aides followed in her wake through the crowd.

“Beautiful horse, Captain,” she said.

Andrew turned in the direction of the remark to find a tall, willowy woman dressed in the finest style headed in his direction.

“What’s his name, Captain?” Maggie stroked the gray horse.

“Stoneybrooke; Captain Andrew Browning at your service, ma’am,” Andrew replied.

“Maggie Strickland.” She offered her hand. “I’m a journalist and a representative of Massachusetts Abolition League.”

“Good to meet you, Miss Strickland.” Andrew took her hand firmly and then raised it to his lips. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, ma’am. I hope we’ll be in touch while I am in the District.”

Maggie blushed at Andrew’s southern accent and manners. “You’re a Southerner, Captain.”

“Yes, ma’am, but I do not own any slaves.” His reply was curt but soft.

Andrew bowed and led Stoneybrooke off the platform. Maggie watched him with interest, in awe of this tall principled polite Southerner.

A knock sounded at the General Winfield Scott's office door.

"Come!" was the gruff reply.

The broad-shouldered, tall young man entered the room. He doffed his blue officer's hat revealing thick, wavy auburn-streaked chestnut hair. He stood at attention in immaculate full uniform. His auburn mustache and beard were perfectly groomed.

"Captain Andrew Browning, sir, reporting for duty." The 2nd lieutenant escorted him into the general's office.

"You're dismissed, Lieutenant." The general ordered the lieutenant without looking up from his paperwork.

The lieutenant left the room silently and closed the door. Captain Browning stood straight, looking straight ahead. The general looked up at his newest officer in the War Department, Washington, D. C.

"How is the western front, Captain?" asked the general.

"Boring, sir!" answered the captain without facial expression.

General Scott smiled and relaxed back in his chair. He motioned to the colonel at the side of his desk.

"I believe you know Colonel Lee, Captain."

"Yes, sir," answered the serious young captain.

Lee looked up at this young man who was as much a son to him as his own two sons. He had taken him under his wing, procured him an appointment at West Point,

served as superintendent while he was there and watched his career as much as was appropriate.

"At ease, Captain. Have a seat." Scott motioned to a chair.

Andrew drew up a chair and sat down, deftly guiding the sword and sash to an appropriate position. His gray eyes met Colonel Lee's in comfortable camaraderie.

"Good to see you again, Colonel." Andrew's eyes smiled as he spoke.

"And to see you, Andy." Lee's Virginia drawl matched the soft accent in the young man's voice.

"Congratulations, Browning, on your promotion to captain. It's so difficult to advance in rank with so many officers and so few soldiers. I'm sure you realize that advancement comes only at the death or resignation of an older officer," Scott said to him. "Few exceptions exist. You, young man, are an exceptional officer. I've read your commanding officer's recommendations. "

"I'm proud of you, son." Lee agreed as he watched the Andrew's bright eyes twinkle in amusement.

"Thank you, sir." Andrew Browning smiled. Bob Lee's praise meant as much as his own father's did.

"You've received your orders, then, Browning," said the general.

"Yes, sir, but I'm not sure I understand the scope of my new assignment."

"Liaison officer." Lee read the title on the papers before him. "At West Point, you impressed all your teachers with your grasp of tactical warfare and strategy, among other things. You graduated top of your class, went into the engineering corps, and have spent the last six years in the West with the Cavalry."

"All true, sir." Andrew knotted his thick eyebrows in question.

"Andy, I believe you to be trustworthy, loyal, and dependable. I know you to be an officer and a gentleman," Lee said. "The War Department needs you to act as go-between for them and the new President. Lincoln is a lawyer, not a military man."

Scott continued, "He will need help accomplishing the task that lies before him. He also needs someone to protect him during these perilous times. God help us if someone should assassinate him."

Andrew rubbed his hair thoughtfully. "Are you saying I'm to nursemaid the President, sir?"

Scott roared with laughter. "Andy, you do have a way of cutting through it, don't you? Bodyguard, advisor, captain of the guard, any of those have a more military sound than nursemaid, Captain."

"I had hoped, sir, to command a squad," Andrew said wistfully.

"And so you shall. You shall command a squad of the Army of the Potomac. Your squad's duty will be security and protection of the White House and Capitol. These are dangerous times."

The general chose a cigar from the tin on his desk and lit the snipped end. He offered one to Colonel Lee, who took one, but Andrew waved away the proffered cigar. He regarded the young man's disappointed face. He exhaled a cloud of blue smoke into the stagnant air.

"Browning, this is no ordinary assignment. I know a military man hopes for glory on the battlefield. But, Captain, sometimes diplomacy is more valuable than war. If this country goes to war to return the five southern states to the Union, Abraham Lincoln will

need all the help he can get to reunite the Union. Georgia and Louisiana look to join them soon." Scott shook his head sadly. "You are more valuable to your country in the White House and halls of Congress, Browning, than dead on a glorious battlefield."

Andrew smiled grimly. "Yes, sir. Thank you for your kind words, sir."

General Scott leaned back heavily in his chair, regarding Andrew through the smoky blue haze.

"We're placing a great deal of faith in you, Browning. Are you our man or not?"

"Yes, sir," answered Andrew.

"Good. Stow your personals at Lee's home in Arlington until your living quarters are secured. You are on duty as of 0900 tomorrow at the White House to help the transition team, as necessary, prepare for a new President. Your squad should be reporting to you at your desk at the White House between then and the 1st of February."

"Very good, sir!" Andrew stood and saluted smartly. He picked up his hat and waited for dismissal.

"Good to have you here, Andy." Lee smiled. "Dinner is served promptly at six at the house. Join us." Lee saluted the new captain.

"Dismissed," General Scott ordered as he stubbed out his cigar.

Captain Browning settled into Lee's home and his office at the White House, as commanded. For three weeks, he drilled his squad of men on protocol and security procedures for Lincoln's arrival. All seemed in readiness. By the end of the next week, a brownstone apartment near the White House was to be ready for his occupation.

Each night he arrived at Lee's home in Arlington exhausted as no physical labor would exhaust him. On the night of February 11, he sat in his room at the Lee mansion following dinner, reading his worn Bible after packing nonessential items for removal to his new quarters.

"Andrew!"

The deep voice reverberated in the high foyer of the Arlington mansion.

Andrew's thick chestnut hair bounced as he rushed down the stair to the man's summons.

"Sir!" he answered.

He snapped to attention in the library of the home. The older man smoked his cigar pensively.

"At ease, Andy." The man gestured to the chair across from him with the smoky end of the cigar. "This is my home, man, not the barracks."

"Yes, sir," Andrew answered briskly. The habit had been ingrained at the Academy as respect due a higher ranking officer. "How can I serve you, sir?"

The older man laughed congenially at the young man before him. Young, handsome, and smart he was. He could go far in his military career if only ...The man stubbed out the stogie and cursed under his breath.

"Andy, how long have you known me?"

"Ever since I was a child, I suspect, sir," the younger man answered in his soft Virginia drawl. "Your family always stabled your horses at my family's stables and blacksmith forge. Father has been your friend and you, his friend and customer."

"Correct, Andy. So drop the 'sir' stuff for this evening and let's talk man to man rather than colonel to captain."

Andrew rubbed his large hands awkwardly, feeling lost with this familiarity. He waved those hands in the air with a gesture of confusion.

"Colonel, I am indebted to you as an officer as well as a man. How can I call you anything but 'sir'?"

The colonel laughed.

"When have the Lees ever intimidated you? I seem to remember a young boy stealing an apple off a tree before my very nose back in Lee Hall."

Andrew blushed to the roots of his chestnut hair highlighting the auburn streaks running through it. His auburn beard glowed atop his flaming face. His clear, gray eyes looked into Colonel Lee's eyes.

"And it was very good, sir."

At that, they both roared with laughter, decorum set aside for the time being.

"Andy, a very serious time is upon us." The colonel lit another cigar. "As you know, Lincoln's election set off a string of secession in the South. Texas is the eighth now. Rumor has it that Virginia will be next."

Andrew jumped from his chair.

"How can Virginia secede on the very steps of the Capitol?" he asked.

"There's much talk of war, Andy."

The statement hung on the stale smoke suspended between them from the general's cigar.

"What will you do, sir?" Andrew asked quietly.

The tired man sighed. "Loyalties will be tried, son. Mark my word, Andrew Browning. Choices will have to be made."

Andrew felt the weight of indecision that tired the great man before him.

What choices might I have to make as well? he thought.

"Well, you must also think to your own choices, son," the colonel spoke, as though reading his mind. "Virginians are a special people. We have trouble with others telling us what to do. And we're loyal to what we believe."

Lee stood and stared out the window overlooking the lights of Washington.

"Some folks in Virginia believe in slavery. Some folks don't. But they all believe in the right to choose without the government saying one way or other. The news is that Virginia plans to convene on Wednesday to decide the question of secession."

"So you believe Virginia will secede as well." It was a statement, not a question.

"Yes," answered Lee after a moment's reflection. "She will. And I will have to remain loyal to her."

"You would leave the U. S. Army, sir?" Andrew dropped his lanky frame into the chair, stunned.

Lee strolled over to his own chair and sat at the edge of it.

"And you, Captain Browning, will have to make a choice as well. Think well on it. Your future may well depend on that one choice."

Andrew searched the face of Robert E. Lee for some hint of what to do. The man smiled, reached across the distance between them, and patted his knee.

"Don't worry, Andy. God already knows your choice. You merely need to follow His lead."

Colonel Lee reached across the large desk for a pen and paper. He signed the paper with a flourish and presented it to Andrew.

Andrew read the paper before him.

"A week's pass, sir?"

"In a week or so, we'll hopefully know the outcome in Richmond. Go home. Talk to your father. Complete your courtship with Miss Anderson. Do not wear your uniform. Make your choice. By then, I shall know mine. Lincoln is due to arrive on the twenty-third, and you'll need to be here by then if you plan to stay. Many commissions have already been resigned. You may be promoted swiftly if you stay."

The men laughed grimly.

"I've already notified the War Department of your leave. You can travel at dawn, if you like."

"Thank you, sir."

Andrew stood and saluted smartly before retiring to his room to finish packing and to pray.

Chapter 2

Going Home

Tuesday morning dawned clear and cold on the Tidal Basin.

In a traveling suit, Andrew tied his belongings in a pack onto his horse. In the pack were a gift of fabric and tea for Mama, newspapers and coffee for Papa, and candy, fruit, and ribbons for his twin sisters. All were wrapped with his uniform and a change of civilian clothing. He pulled his blue wool officer's overcoat on and gazed a long time at the Capitol, the White House, and the rest of the District of Columbia. On such a peaceful morning, it was hard to believe there would be war again for the fourth time in less than a century.

But this time, the enemy will not be Britain, but ourselves, he thought gloomily.

He finally mounted his horse, Stoneybrooke, and started down the incline from the Lee House into Arlington. Robert E. Lee stood at the window with his morning coffee. Andrew saluted the colonel he loved and admired. The man waved back a salute.

"Choose well, Andy," Lee spoke quietly to himself. "May God guide your path."

As Andrew Scott Browning rode his mount down the roads of Virginia toward Richmond and eventually into Williamsburg and Lee Hall, he reviewed his family's past.

First, he thought of his great-grandfather, Colin Michael Browning. Colin had served under coercion in the British army during the Revolution. However, he had also acted as an informant for General Washington during the conflict and spent the Battle of Yorktown as Washington's aide de camp.

Then he thought of his grandfather, Michael Andrew Browning. Born during the battle of Bunker Hill, raised in Williamsburg during much of the revolution by his mother, Michael Browning served the United States during the war of 1812.

His own father, Colin Scott Browning, had built his grandfather's blacksmith business to an expanded operation including more land and stables for the landed gentry to keep and buy their horses. He employed freed black men but refused to use slave labor to run his forge and stables. He had impressed on Andrew the importance of defending what you believe in based on the family heritage and Christianity.

After reviewing the family history, he thought of where he had been. First came West Point at Robert E. Lee's gracious letter of recommendation. Valedictorian of his class, he had served in the Western theater in the Cavalry. Now he had been appointed to the War Department as liaison officer between the President and the Department. He served the President and his country with pride. How could he give all that up now?

As he skirted the capital building in Richmond, he felt the tension in the air as the chambers no doubt echoed with angry debate.

As the sun began to set, Andrew finally reached the final stretch of road toward home. Plantations abutted the road. Spreading limbs created a cover of intertwined

trees. Lights shone from the majestic homes that were spaced luxuriously and faced the James River. Slaves completed their work as Andrew rode past hailing those he knew near the road.

"James! How's Miss Sarah?"

"Miz Sarah's no longer with me, Andy," called the young man.

"Why, James?" asked Andrew with concern.

"Miss Anderson had need of her, sir."

Andrew clenched the reins of the horse tightly.

"The Andersons bought your wife from Mr. Neale?" he asked in anger.

"Yessir," the man looked down in grief.

"That is unconscionable, James. I shall have a word with Miss Emily when I see her tomorrow. Perhaps we can work a deal to help get you both back together, James."

"You're a good man, Andrew Browning. How's the army treating you?"

"Times are changing, James. Many things are changing, hopefully for the better."

The dinner bell rang at the Neale plantation. James waved a good-bye, and Andrew rode on to his father's business establishment and home.

The split rail fences marked the beginning of the family property. Stoneybrooke danced with excitement at the gate holding the business sign, "Browning's Blacksmithy and Stables."

"Home, Stoney," he soothed the mount. "Let's have a drink at the creek."

He steered the horse to the splashing cold water of the creek beside the drive. He held the reins while Stoney drank thirstily of the cool clear water. Then he tied the horse to a nearby tree and stooped down to the brook. Laying his hat on the bank,

Andrew dipped his hand into it and drank a long drink. He splashed his face with the cold water and shook it off laughing. The horse whinnied his approval. Andrew wiped down his face with a handkerchief and smoothed his beard and mustache. He combed back his wavy, auburn-streaked hair. He wiped his hands on his coat and replaced his hat on his head.

"Do I look presentable now, Stoney?" he asked.

The horse tossed his mane in anticipation of a familiar stall for the night. Andrew stroked the horse's mane and climbed aboard for the final minutes of the trip.

"William!" called Andrew to one of the freedman whom his father employed.

"Why, Captain Browning! Is it really you? Is Mister Scott expecting you?" answered William.

"No, sir. I'm a total surprise. Should I return all the way to Washington and send a cable?" Andrew asked with a mischievous grin.

"No, sir, Andy. Your parents and sisters are always pleased to see you. Let me give old Stoney a grooming, oats, and a fresh stall."

"Thank you, William," Andrew said gratefully. "I could use a similar respite."

He handed William the reins and shook the man's hand. Tiredness overtook him as he looked at the funny-shaped house with the friendly lighted windows. Home. He had finally arrived.

He rapped at the door firmly. The door swung open revealing his father, Scott Browning. As a large, muscular man, he filled the doorway.

"I'm seeking shelter for the night, sir. A bed, a meal, and lodging for my horse," Andrew explained as though he was a stranger.

Scott looked out into the dark night pensively. A look of recognition crossed his face before Andrew was smothered in a bear hug from the big man.

"Libby, come and see your son who's appeared out of the night!" he called to his wife.

Shrieks of joy rose from the kitchen, and Andrew's mother and twin sisters, Sally and Amy, fought for an opportunity to get a hug and a kiss from the only son of Scott and Libby Browning. Andrew hugged them all and distributed the gifts he'd brought.

"More stew, Andy?" asked his mother after he'd eaten several other servings. "There's plenty, if you need more."

"Mama, I will pop if I eat another bite. I need to fit in my uniform by the end of the week, you know."

"You look thinner, son. Don't you eat well? Are you working too hard?" His mother looked concerned at his thin appearance.

"Mama, no one cooks like you. If I lived at home, I'd be twice as big, and you'd be saying I ate you out of house and home," Andrew assured her as he pushed aside the bowl.

"Tell us about Washington. Have you seen the new senator? Is he as dashing as they say?" asked Sally wistfully.

"Yes, Sal, and married."

The older strawberry-haired twin sighed. At eighteen, she looked timeless. Her curly hair and fair skin radiated the glow of youth and the inner beauty of Christianity.

Her green eyes glowed with love for her older brother. She twisted the green ribbons Andrew had brought her around her finger as she listened expectantly.

"Do you really see President Buchanan, Drew?" asked the second twin, Amy.

"Yes, Amy. It's my job to act as liaison for the President and the War Department. I also command the troops guarding the President and the White House."

"Are the balls wonderful? How I'd like to see the women's fashions and the men adorned in their evening suits!"

Amy's blue eyes glistened in merriment at the thought of such a sight. She wound her strawberry hair onto the top of her head with the new blue ribbons from Andrew. She then impersonated a fine gentlewoman curtsying to her date and dancing across the room. She whirled herself into a dizzying spin and collapsed in Andrew's lap in a fit of laughter.

"Yes, Amy, the balls are beautiful."

"Do you have a special lady, Drew?" asked Sally.

"Of course. Emily Anderson. You know I've been engaged to her for six years now."

The twins grimaced at the thought of the neighboring woman on Barrington Plantation.

"No comments from the likes of you two," rebuked their mother. "Time you both were in bed. Scoot off with you so you can get your beauty sleep."

"Please let Andrew first read the Bible tonight!" they pleaded.

Their father consented and handed him the family Bible. It had belonged to Benjamin Andrews, Andrew's great-great-uncle. Uncle Ben had fought in the Revolution

with the Sons of Liberty. He'd also started the Baptist church nearby as its minister until his death. Each night the family read from this Bible and prayed together during family worship time.

Andrew opened the Bible to the marked place and began to read, "Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, 14: To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; A time to love and a time to hate; a time of war and a time of peace. . . . I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him."

Andrew closed the worn Bible and prayed aloud, "Lord Father God, You have brought us to this time and place to serve you and do your will. You know the choices to make and their outcome. You have set the stars in their courses and set time and history in place. Lord, give us all spiritual wisdom to make the choices that are pleasing to you. Make us wise in seeing you work in the time you have appointed us. Amen."

The young ladies kissed their brother good-night and hurried to prepare for bed.

"A solemn prayer, Andy," his father remarked. "Why have you come home, son?"

Andrew explained the situation as Robert Lee had presented it to him. His father noted in the newspapers Andrew had brought him the truth of Lee's words. His mother

brewed him a cup of tea from her new tin and set it before him as he and his father talked.

"What will you do, Andy?" Scott Browning finally asked.

"I don't know, sir," he replied. "I know that Bob Lee will side with the South if Virginia secedes, and I feel a certain loyalty to my home. . ."

"Go on," his father encouraged.

"I've been trained to serve the United States Army. To desert and fight against the Union is called treason and is punishable by death. I can't imagine leaving the Union to fight against something in which I've invested ten years of my life. I'd be throwing away my career and possibly my life. The way Lee sees it, it's a matter of states' rights. I'm not certain that's the reason most of the South wants to leave the Union. Slavery seems to be the hinge pin on which the issues turn. I'm not sure I could fight to preserve the bondage of men."

"Well said, son. What of Emily, then?"

"If she'll have me, I plan to marry her and take her to Washington, unless I choose to join the Confederacy. Father, it may be dangerous for you if I remain in the Union army. Some of your neighbors here may resent that choice. That's another factor I feel I should consider."

"I hope our safety is not a deciding factor, Andy. You must make the choice God has for you to make. I can care for our family, regardless of your choice."

"Perhaps you could all come to Washington during the interim. Any war shouldn't last very long," Andrew suggested.

Scott examined his son carefully and considered his suggestion. The older man rose from his seat at the table and stood before the dying fire.

"Andy, a man has to do what a man has to do. Perhaps your mother and sisters would enjoy an extended visit in Washington as your guests. I need to stay and care for the business and land so you will have an inheritance and occupation to come home to someday, if that is what you choose. It was my father's legacy to me and his father's to him. I'll not let it go without a fight so I can hand it to you, someday."

"Thank you, sir," Andrew replied. "I shall take your advice into consideration during my stay. I must return on Monday."

A yawn seized Andrew, and he stretched as he yawned.

His mother patted his hand as he brought it back into his lap.

"Perhaps rest is the first choice you should make. Without sleep, you'll not be making any wise choices," she reminded him.

"Yes, ma'am," he said and smiled at her with love. "Maybe I've needed my mother in Washington and in the Western territories these last years after all to tell me when to go to bed," he teased.

She ruffled his hair with love and blushed.

"I forget you're all of twenty-eight, Drew. I guess a mother always thinks her son is a little boy who needs mothering."

"And don't you forget it, Mama," he hugged her tenderly. "Good-night."

Chapter 3 Barrington Plantation

Andrew awoke refreshed in the same bed he'd slept in for 18 years prior to going away to West Point Academy. Except for brief visits home, he'd not slept in it since then. Those ten years had sped by for him. Finishing training at the Academy, doing field service in the army after graduation, and finally being promoted to his rank and position in Washington had taken a brief time. Yet, those ten years seemed to be his whole life now. The world he'd ridden into last night seemed unreal and not part of the Captain Andrew Scott Browning he had become.

Andrew rose and slipped on work pants and a flannel shirt and wandered through the house toward the smell of frying ham.

"Good morning, Mother," he said as he greeted her in the ancient kitchen.

He hugged and kissed her grandly. She smiled and waved him to a chair at the table.

The house began in this large room. When his great-grandfather, Colin Browning, had settled here after the Revolution, he'd built this section of the house. Each generation had enlarged it since as needs required and fortunes allowed. The house rambled some but held more character than the stately plantations built up and down the James River. From the window, he saw the stables and his father's employees exercising the horses. It was a peaceful sight; no way did it resemble the hustle of midmorning Washington D. C.

After breakfast, he retired to his room with warm water in his wash basin. He dropped the suspenders from his shoulders and stripped off his shirt. He confronted his mustached face in the mirror. *Emily hates mustaches*, he thought. *This has to go before I see her this morning.*

"Whatcha doing, Drew?" called a pretty strawberry-haired young lady from the hall. "Can I come in?"

The man in the mirror smiled at the sight of one of his twin sisters behind him.

"Come in, Amy. I was just about to shave."

The pretty eighteen-year-old flounced into the room and plopped on the bed. She flung her red locks over her shoulder and watched her older brother with admiration as he soaped his face. Amy was the younger twin and had the tender heart. She enjoyed new dresses, ribbons, and lace. She was the southern belle in the Browning family.

"Come, Amy. Don't scowl. It's not becoming in a beautiful young woman," Andrew reprimanded her.

"Why are you shaving your mustache and beard, Drew? It's so handsome."

"Emily hates mustaches, doesn't she, brother dear," answered a carbon of the girl lounging on his bed. Sally was independent, quick thinking, and pragmatic. She dressed fashionably, but it wasn't all she thought about.

"Quite right, Sal," he agreed as he focused on the chestnut face hair in the mirror.

"I think Emily is horrid. She treats all people with disgust. All she cares about is how someone looks," Amy pouted.

"She cares a great deal about how much wealth and land they have, Amy," Sally said.

"And she cares about protecting her right to enslave people, Sally."

The two girls bantered back and forth as though Andrew wasn't in the room. Andrew listened as he carefully wielded the straight razor toward his upper lip.

"No!" shouted Amy. "You're not really going to shave it off are you? It makes you look so debonair, Drew!"

"A call at Barrington Plantation requires a clean-shaven face. After six years engagement to Emily, I know how I'd best show my face in her home," Andrew answered as he scraped the edge over the lip and whisked away the right side of the hair in question.

"Please don't go see Emily, Drew," pleaded Sally. "Stay and ride with us today. There's a new colt in the barn you'd love to see."

"We see you so seldom, Drew. Please don't go," affirmed Amy.

Andrew washed away the excess soap and hair and faced his sisters.

"What do you think, ladies?"

In a second, he held both girls in his arms. They hugged and laughed and kissed.

"You look so young for such an old man." Sally laughed when he grimaced at her remark.

"Mustache or not, I love you anyway, Drew. Can Emily say the same?" Amy answered with a huff.

"Come on, girls. If your beau didn't come to call on you the very day he came to town, you'd be quite put out. I've been home a whole 14 hours and haven't darkened Emily's door. She'll not have that kind of behavior." Andrew took on a mysterious look. "After all, a wedding is a serious thing to contemplate after six years of engagement."

The two girls gasped in horror.

"Oh, Andrew, don't marry her. She's not a nice person," asserted Amy.

Sally agreed, "Seriously, Drew, she despises us and our way of life."

"And she treats her people terribly. I shudder to think of you in her house," Amy rejoined.

"Girls!" a voice from the hall interrupted. "A man has a choice in his selection of a mate. Andrew has made his choice."

Libby Browning stood gazing at her grown, clean-shaven, bare-chested son.

“How handsome you look, Andrew. I’m sure any girl would choose you for her affections.”

Andrew laughed and looked into the mirror. His gray eyes twinkled back at him. The reddened face glistened back at him. The ruffled hair mocked his mother’s appraisal.

“Yes, Mother. Only a mother could love this face.”

The women disputed him loudly until Scott Browning entered the room.

“What is this? My daughters and wife fawning over my son. Leave the man alone until he’s at least dressed himself. He’s old enough to accomplish that task alone, I suspect.”

The women clucked and cooed as he shooed them from his son’s room. Andrew laughed at their insistent pleas for mercy and their blown kisses as they reluctantly left the room. His father closed the door against their protests and sat down on the bed himself.

Andrew plucked a fresh shirt from the wardrobe and slid his long arms into the sleeves.

“Going courting, son?”

“Yes, sir. I think six years is too long a time to be engaged, especially with this war business brewing. Some things need to be decided.”

“Have you made any decision yet on the army, son?”

“No, sir. I believe that Emily must be included in any such discussion. What I do will affect her, too, if she’ll still have me.”

Andrew completed his dressing in a fashionable yet worn suit. He combed the wayward hair into submission. His father remained silent on the bed.

“You don’t approve of her either, do you, sir?” Andrew asked as he turned to face him.

"You've known that a long time, Andy. You also have known that it's your choice to make. She does not approve of us, either."

"Nonsense, Papa. Why would she have me if she felt the family was beneath her?" Andrew asked. "She is just different."

"She's not a Christian, Andy."

Silence pervaded the room.

"She goes to her church."

"You know, my son, that that is not the point. You have not been here to see Emily grow up."

Andrew breathed a sigh and slipped into his blue wool overcoat.

"I shall return by supper, sir. Thank you for your concern."

He saluted the older man out of force of habit, picked up his hat, and escaped to the stables to harness his horse for the ride to Barrington Plantation.

Andrew rode into the luxurious entrance of Barrington. The Anderson's lackey greeted him cheerfully.

"Andy! Andy Browning! You're a sight for sore eyes!"

Andrew jumped from the horse and embraced the young man who greeted him.

"Johnny! I've missed sailing the high seas with you over the driveway in the tops of the trees!" Andrew's gray eyes twinkled recalling the play of two much younger boys. "How is life treating you, my friend?"

The slave's face became downcast, and he looked away. Andrew's brow furrowed in confusion. Andrew released his grip on the other man's hand and repeated his question.

"There's no play for slaves when they grow up, Captain Browning. Forgive me. I forgot my place."

"Hold on Johnny. I feel no differently about you now than when we were seven and nearly falling from the top of yonder Bradford pear tree. I'll not tolerate 'Captain Browning' from you lest we're in that tree on our imaginary yardarms. Andy works just fine, Johnny."

"Not if Miss Emily hears it, it don't. We're sure looking forward to you marrying into the family and changing things here at Barrington."

Johnny took the horse and led it into the carriage house for grooming. Andrew stood perplexed behind them.

"Has so much changed since I've been away?" he asked aloud.

He ambled to the front door and rapped the door knocker. The door swung open to reveal a tall, handsome man in servant attire.

"Captain Browning. Miss Emily will be so glad to hear you are here. May I take your coat, sir?"

Andrew shrugged the blue wool from his shoulders. He handed him his hat as well.

"Marcus? That is you Marcus, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir. Let me fetch Miss Emily for you, sir."

Andrew touched the man's arm gently.

"'Yes, sir' is all the hello I get from you Marcus? What about all the summers we fished and crabbed in the James River? Are they gone, too?"

"Things change, sir," Marcus answered, emotionless.

"Do people change also? Are we no longer friends?"

"Captain Browning, you'll be the master here someday. It's not proper to have friends like me."

"Andrew, darling!"

A shriek of joy rang from the top of the grand staircase. Andrew turned to behold his intended, Emily Willet Anderson. She gracefully hurried down the stairs with skirts

and petticoats flying. Her golden curls bounced at each step and her pink lips smiled at him.

Andrew met her halfway up the staircase, taking the steps by two. He kissed her hand delicately.

"Emily, I had forgotten how lovely you are."

"A sight lovelier than Washington, Andrew?"

"Of course, sweetheart," he replied.

The lovely woman took his arm and daintily descended the remaining stairs. She guided him into the parlor. They kissed chastely.

"How long have you been here? Did Marcus make you wait? He shall be reprimanded for not notifying me of your arrival sooner, I can assure you."

A dark cloud crossed before her blue eyes and fair face.

Andrew quickly replied, "No, Emily. I had just arrived, and I was the one that detained him with questions."

The cloud vanished in her dazzling smile.

"You've left the Union army then to join the Confederacy. Militia units have sprouted up all over the county. You could lead one yourself with your training and experience. Why, Dr. Curtis plans on forming his own militia and drilling them in the yard at End View Plantation! The Warwick Beauregards is what he plans to call them once Virginia secedes."

Andrew cleared his throat. "I haven't decided whether that is the course God would have me to take yet, Emily. That's one of the reasons I'm home this week. The other is to inquire as to how long an engagement we will have. With war brewing, our engagement may need termination in marriage before long."

Emily gasped and hugged him ferociously.

"I knew the war was good news. Of course, we could have married sooner. But you insisted in staying in the dreary old West when you could have been here with me. Instead I sit here and become an old maid."

Emily pursed her lips in a pout. Andrew recognized the gesture from many discussions of the matter. He kissed her pursed lips gently. She laughed and hugged him again.

"What's this I see?" bellowed the deep voice of Willet Anderson. "Is this my future son-in-law back from the dreaded Union Capitol?"

Andrew jumped to his feet and extended his hand to the hard, short man.

"Yes, sir."

"Take a port with me, son. Emily, run to your needlework while Andy and I discuss particulars."

Emily pouted and walked insolently from the room.

Andrew stiffened as the man poured him a glass of the liquor.

"You remember, sir, that I do not drink."

"Nor smoke a good cigar once in a while, either," Willet recalled. "I had thought living in a sinful city such as Washington and riding the barren plains would have mellowed some of your high principles."

"No, sir. My principles are not up for mellowing, sir."

Willet stared up at Andrew, eye-to-eye. Finally he slapped him on the back and laughed. He tossed down the port in his glass as well as the glass he had poured for Andrew.

The two men toured the plantation and discussed the crops to put in for spring. They toured the slaves' quarters on the back acre of Barrington. Though Andrew recognized many of the faces from his childhood, none of them spoke or acknowledged his presence. At midday, they returned to the house for lunch on the side board. Emily served them graciously, as beautiful as always.

"Yes, son, this will all be yours someday. After your marriage and my death, the Barrington will be yours to command, with Emily's aid, of course, since you have no background in running a plantation or managing slaves." Willet ate while he talked of the future of Barrington.

Andrew watched Emily and her father over his tea. They were quite a pair, a duet, since Emily's mother's death while he was at West Point.

She is much like him. The thought occurred to him suddenly. It sent a shiver down his spine.

"What do you think, Andrew?" Emily asked as she offered him more tea. "Will June be soon enough for our wedding?"

"Depends on the politics in Richmond, Emily," Andrew began.

"Of course, Andy. You may be at war against them Yankees by then. Emily, could you have everything in readiness by March?" her father asked.

Emily looked stunned.

"But, Daddy, there's so much to do to be ready!"

"You can do it swiftly, I suspect, Emily. This young man is pressed by the demands of duty to his home and way of life. You can't expect him to wait until he's in the throes of war to think of love."

Andrew choked on his tea. Miss Sarah, the cook and James's wife, rushed from the kitchen to aid him.

"Are you all right, Captain?" she asked over and over.

"Sarah!" yelled Emily. "Return to the kitchen at once! The Captain will be fine once you stop pounding him on his back."

Andrew caught his breath and reached out for Sarah's hand.

Clearing his throat, he whispered hoarsely, "Miss Sarah, I saw James on the way in. He misses you so."

As he looked into her dark brown eyes, he saw a flood of emotion wave through them. The first, a look of supreme love, the second, a wistfulness of yearning, the last, a look of resignation and defeat.

"Yes, sir," she whispered.

He dropped her hand, and she returned to the kitchen.

"What did you say to her?" demanded Emily. "You held that slave's hand. I demand to know what that was all about."

Andrew looked up into commanding eyes. He saw no love there, no yearning, only hatred for a woman who had been sold from her husband's side. Anger filled Andrew over her lack of compassion.

"I told her that I saw her husband, James, at the Neale's on the way in. He misses her. That's all."

"You are out of line, Browning. That woman is my property. Her husband has no such right to claim her. Slaves cannot own property," stated Mr. Anderson stiffly,

Andrew caught his tongue before he said something he'd be sorry for later.

But it's wrong, Andrew thought in his silence. Dead wrong. I'd certainly be angry if someone ripped my wife from my side.

He said nothing, though.

"We must throw a barbecue on Friday to celebrate our setting a wedding date. Wouldn't that be divine, Father?" Emily covered over the fearful silence.

"An excellent plan, Emily. What do you say, Andy?" Willet agreed.

"Of course. I leave for Washington on Monday."

"But I thought you were staying, Andrew."

"That would be desertion, ma'am," he replied curtly. "I must return home now. My father may need me to help out while I'm home."

As he rose from the table, Emily deftly jumped to his side and walked him to the foyer. Marcus brought his coat and hat. As he turned to go, Emily caught his arm.

"By the way, I'm sure your parents and sisters would feel quite out of place on Friday. None of the people they know will be here. Father will only invite landowners to this barbecue. We can hold a second reception sometime before the wedding with their friends, if you like."

Sally and Amy's words returned to his mind from the morning. He stroked his chin where his beard and mustache had been.

Could my family be right about Emily? he wondered as Emily kissed his cheek and shoved him out the door.