

## TESTIMONIES

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“This is a thoroughly engrossing young person’s account of seemingly an improbable event associated with the Civil War Battle of Perryville. The writing style is quite readable and entertaining. I especially enjoyed the story development and its various twists and turns. I highly recommend this wonderful piece of fiction.”

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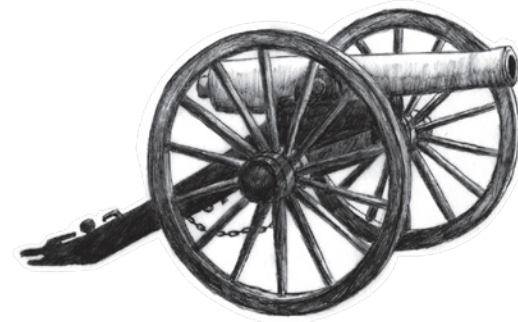


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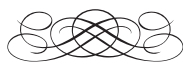
# *The Lost Dispatch*



Written by  
**Marie Mitchell & Mason Smith**

Illustrations by  
**Ryan Lanigan**

**The Clark Group** | Lexington, Kentucky



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Designed by Ryan Lanigan.

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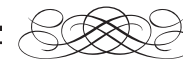
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*For our own family treasures:*

*Mitchell,*

*Marlowe,*

*Ruby Margaret,*

*and Ingrid.*

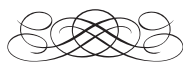
- M.M. and M.S.

*For my wife,*

*Renee, and my*

*son, Aiden.*

- R.L.



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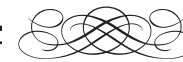
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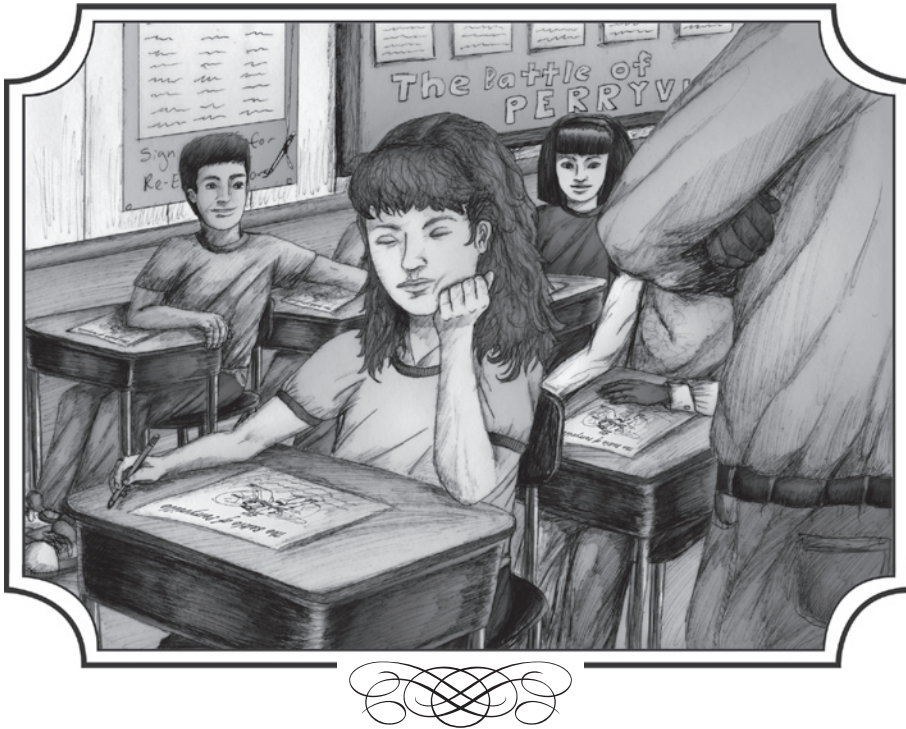


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## CHAPTER ONE

## Preparing for Battle



Victoria Johnson, *please* pay attention.”

Oops. Mr. Harvey’s teacher-radar detected me doodling. Drawing is my best boredom buster. And it was working—up until now.

My latest masterpiece: a platypus. It’s not easy sketching its long duck-like bill and beaver-type tail. And let’s be honest, the platypus has a face only a mother could love.

Still, it’s my favorite mammal of the month. And I was close to finishing the drawing when my sixth-grade history teacher demanded my attention.

“I’m all over it, Mr. Harvey,” I assured him. Which wasn’t entirely true.

History has never been my strong subject. Too many

dates and discoverers to memorize. And most of those explorers were foreigners with names that are hard to spell.

For the past week we've been stranded in early October, 1862. The Battle of Perryville. My class would actually be reliving that Civil War battle this weekend.

The Kentucky Parks Department has sponsored re-enactments for years. This time *we* get to join in the fun. Big Whoop!

"Way to go, Vic. You just zoned out on everything you'll need to know to survive the battle."

I tried to ignore the person whispering behind me. It was just Latisha, my arch enemy. What did I care about her comment? But she was enjoying my embarrassment *way* too much. I had to say something.

"Hush," I hissed. Hey, it was the best I could do on the spur of the moment. Quick thinking is not my specialty. You think you could do better? Then try.

Now, time to smooth things over with my teacher.

"I'm really jazzed about the re-enactment, Mr. Harvey," I lied. "You can count on me to take a hit for the class if necessary."

It's not like I had a choice in any of this madness. As new president of the Perryville Chamber of Commerce, my mom would be spending all weekend making sure everyone had a pleasant Civil War experience. My dad inconveniently volunteered to help out at the Battlefield Museum.



So it was either enlist as a soldier or spend quality time with Granny Gladys and her yappy Chihuahua, Taco. My parents were ecstatic when I chose to "seize this wonderful educational opportunity," as they put it.

"This is a rare chance for you all to be part of a living history event," Mr. Harvey droned on. "I want you to be well prepared for your roles in the largest Civil War battle fought in Kentucky."

Mr. Harvey had spent a lot of time doing genealogy research and discovered a great-great-grandfather who fought in the Union Army. He was so psyched by that news that he recruited our class for the re-enactment. This way we can learn for ourselves what conditions were like for the soldiers.

He needed a better sales pitch, though. All Mr. Harvey talked about were the hardships we'd encounter. No electronics. No air-conditioning. No comfy beds.

Some wimpy kids deserted early—whining about sick relatives or prior commitments that would keep them from doing their duty.

Right now we were waiting for some re-enactors to talk to us about our upcoming experience. The re-enactors are normal people during the week, but on the weekends something weird happens—they dress up in blue or gray and resurrect battles across the country.

Some hobby. Very predictable. No matter how many times they re-created a clash between North and South—



the outcome would *always* be the same.

“Any questions about the battle itself that I can answer before our re-enactors arrive?” Mr. Harvey asked.

Yeah. My question: *Who cares?*

I tried to stretch my long legs under my ridiculously short desk. Who makes school furniture anyway? Evil elves in the off-season?

Reminder: the Civil War was fought about 150 years ago, and there’s no mystery about who won—the North. Everybody needs to accept this and get over it.

I’ve lived my whole life in Perryville, Kentucky, so I’ve heard about the battle since I was in pre-school. The story never changes. Same old, same old.

Still, I’d been promised some much-needed extra credit for experiencing the joys of camping out on the hard ground, in a hot, buggy, musty tent. Not to mention the bonus prize of eating stuff that gave the soldiers diarrhea.

They called it “dysentery” back then. But the result is pretty awful no matter *what* you call it.

Our social studies textbook says more men died of diseases than battle wounds. I hope I don’t become a casualty of either one.

I looked up to find Mr. Harvey’s finger pointing directly at me—again. What did I miss *this* time?

“Yes, Latisha,” he said. I was both relieved that he

was calling on the fashionably dressed, brainy student behind me, and irritated that *she* would be the one to ask the first question.

“What if we get lost on the battlefield?” Latisha said, lightly stroking her corn rows.

That’s a habit I find totally annoying. Latisha thinks it makes her appear “pensive.” That’s right, *pensive*. Look it up. I had to.

What a *lame* question. I rolled my eyes and shook my head, sending waves of brown curls bouncing around my shoulders. That tickled my neck, making me giggle.

Honest. It was a giggle. I couldn’t help it.

“That’s a *great* question, Latisha,” Mr. Harvey said, playing into her scheming hand.

In my school, the dictionary defines “teacher’s pet” as a trendy black girl named Latisha who manages to manipulate all her sixth-grade teachers while alienating her classmates.

You think I’m joking? Come see for yourself.

“Many units got lost during the *real* battle,” Mr. Harvey continued. “It was one of the most confusing engagements of the Civil War. But we’ll have experienced re-enactors with you at all times. They’ll guide you through the battle.”

I hoped he wouldn’t launch into one of his lengthy lectures about how important this battle was to the Civil



War. Mr. Harvey thought that Perryville was the true high-tide of the Confederacy, not Gettysburg fought a year later.

He said it was the South's best chance of winning the war. He'd said it at least a hundred times.

"Do we get to carry *real* guns?" asked Jason, my closest guy pal. I tower over his stocky frame by about a foot.

Jason is brilliant, with a snappy comeback for every occasion—but he spends entirely too much time grasping a game controller in his stubby hands.

The only weapons Jason's ever handled are ones that he won through his Nintendo Wii games. Or some wizard's battle ax that he earned playing Dungeons and Dragons.

"We'll have some wooden muskets that look authentic enough," Mr. Harvey answered, "but they are perfectly safe for our purposes. You'll march behind two lines of adult re-enactors and will help fill out the regiment."

That made us sound like "extras" in an epic movie. The ones who don't get their names in the credits because they're killed off early in the script. But we served a purpose.

When organizers started counting uniforms, they realized they had more Confederate re-enactors than Union troops, and the Rebels needed a few more Yankees to shoot at. So they agreed to let our class be targets—like deer during hunting season.

Only we'd be sitting ducks out in the open field.

"If we get shot, will it hurt?" Jorge asked, reading my mind.

I didn't look forward to dropping onto the insect-infested battlefield, and baking like a cake in the sun all afternoon. I hate heat. And bugs. Mostly bugs.

"You won't feel a thing," Mr. Harvey reassured us. "The re-enactors shoot blank rounds and they're told to fire in the air, not directly at other soldiers. The front line soldiers will be the most vulnerable. That's where casualties will occur."

Mr. Harvey let that soak in before continuing. "Your job is to listen for orders from your commanding officer—and run away as fast as you can when he gives the signal."

That sounded easy. I could do that. Retreat works for me. I was glad my unit wasn't going to be one of the brave ones that ended up dead. Glorified, but still dead.

My morbid thoughts were interrupted as two costumed characters came calling: Johnny Reb and Southern Belle. They looked like they'd stepped right out of a Civil War battlefield photograph by Mathew Brady, and right into our classroom.

And they looked a little war-weary already.

