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Tears In The Wind
author
Therese A Kraemer
Chapter 1

Prologue

*Its dark, the stars are afraid to see the terror around me,
I sit alone in the cold mud listening to the sound of my heart.
It leaves me pondering on why the hate... the battles and wars?
Again and again one will end...then, another will start,
Because of this, my dreams travel with the winds,
To be planted in the minds of a younger generation.
I pray this time they come to pass and bring a new world,
Then the endless travel of dreams will be warmed by the sun.
Again my heart flutters wildly, skips a beat.
No one hears my desperate cries, but the dead.
Insects buzzing by my ears, or was it bullets,
And who's playing games with my life, my head?
Weeping comes from nearby, his cries echoes with mine.
How many years will pass before smoke clears from the skies.
Does anyone care whose mother's son will return?
Is this the reason we sit and cry our tears in the wind?
No longer wishing to be alone, I seek the company of another,
And I crawl in the direction of the cries of desperation.
"Hey pal," I say, "you have a friend.
I've come to talk and.....BANG!?"*

It seemed as if the whole world was on fire! As if the sun had fallen from the sky burning God's green earth! A smell of blood and fear drifted on the wind and light rain falling did not do anything to lessen the stench of blood and acid gun powder. Blood flowed in vein-like tracks, seeping down cracks of mud like red lava. The sun hadn't shone for days, and Lord knew when the last time the moon was visible. It was as if the southern part of the east coast was covered in a blanket of haze and doom.

Sergeant Arran Keliher was no different than most of the soldiers fighting in this goddamn Civil War! He had lost two cousins and his older brother. He was wet and cold, not to mention starving and in one hell of a, son-of-a-bitch mood; a condition that encased his body and soul like armor. When his older brother Keefer told him that he was going to fight to free slaves, Arran understood the reason, which was that all men were equal; he just didn't believe that killing was the answer to right a wrong. But he seemed to be alone in his calculation. Their father had been persecuted by narrow-minded, bigoted people when he first arrived in America. He and his brother had grown up hearing slurs against his parents because they were Irish. Many were the days he and Keefer arrived home from school with a bloody nose or a blackened eye. It did help that his Uncle Patrick was a policeman on the city streets in the Bronx, not far from their home.

One day when three bullies of their neighborhood began harassing him and his brother, his uncle whacked the little hoodlums on the backside with his nightstick threatening the ruffians with a night in a cell. Of course, it was a hollow threat but they were never bothered again at least not with angry fists. Keefer declared that he wanted to grow up and join the police force. He did.

Arran intended to become a priest but left the monastery when he fell in love and instead he discarded his white collar for a gold wedding ring. His religious beliefs did not alter and he was still a devout Catholic. It was two years after his son was born the Civil War began; now, here he was killing souls instead of saving them.

His mother suffered a heart attack after receiving the news that his brother was killed and three weeks later Arran found his father slouched over a chair in a filthy undershirt and long johns; an empty whiskey bottle lay in his crotch. He had raised his fists in anger at God and went to the local bar. He woke the next morning with a hangover in a strange room only to discover that he had signed up to fight in the Union Army.

That was three months ago.

Last night the lieutenant was killed along with most of his unit. Three young men, not old enough to shave sat huddled a few feet from where he sat on the cold ground.

"Do you know where we are, sir?" asked the skinny kid with shoulder length, dirty hair. His name was Bobby White. His front teeth were so bucked that he looked like a donkey. Arran's mind wasn't focused on the present; it was taken up with the emotional tatters of his life.

"Sir?" the question was repeated.

Arran shrugged. "Afraid not," he replied, his eyes scanning the surroundings. "I suspect we're pretty well south, maybe near Jacksonville."

"Aw, hell, sergeant!" spat another gazing nervously over his shoulder. He claimed that people called him Patches, and Arran never asked. The boy slapped his face to kill a mosquito and then hugged himself to keep from shivering but Arran was certain that it wasn't from the dampness. Damn, he

thought, these kids should be home, held in their mothers arms, not here. The other was a pimple faced boy with red hair. He out did the other two in height and weight. His name was Robby, but everyone called him Stretch.

A twig snapped.

“What was that?” Robby leaped to his feet pointing his bayonet at the foliage.

“Probably a rabbit,” said Stretch licking his lips hopefully. “If it is, kill it, I’m so hungry that I can eat it fur and all.”

Patches eyes grew wide with fear. “Do ya think it’s a cougar?” The sergeant’s horse snorted and appeared skittish. Arran raised his weapon also. Horses were scarce and he wasn’t about to let anything spook the mare.

It happened so fast! Without warning, a soldier jumped on the horse and galloped away. Arran took aim and fired; the thief howled and fell to the ground. The animal continued to run.

“Damn!” Arran groused. “You three go after the mare,” he ordered running towards the injured man. They all hesitated looking skeptical at each other. “Go!” Arran shouted and they jumped to do his bidding. He knew that they were frightened but the horse was a valuable commodity.

Arran cautiously looked down then he knelt and turned the soldier over. He wore a gray uniform so there was no doubt that the would-be thief fought for the south. Blood was quickly spreading over his chest and Arran suspected that the ball went clear through his back. The wounded soldier was Arran’s age, middle twenties. Handsome, what he could see under the facial hairs and dirt. When he opened his eyes, Arran was surprised to see how blue they were and he felt as if he were looking into the eyes of God. A chill ran up his spine not only for that notion but that they conveyed so much pain. Arran became sick to his stomach. He had killed before but never had he looked into the eyes of an enemy he had shot. His stomach twisted into a knot and he felt like weeping.

The soldier coughed up blood and wheezed. “I’m sorry I stole your horse,” he rasped and coughed again. He was choking on his own blood. “I only wanted to get home to see my wife and our first child. I received a message only yesterday that I was a father over a month ago,” he said as his eyes closed but death had still not quite claimed the soldier. “Tell my wife Ginger Ann that I love her and our daughter Sonnet. My wife’s surname is Fountaine.” His breath was being drawn in on slow, audible heaves. “She lives in Key Largo, Florida.” Tears rolled down his muddy face. “Promise me you’ll deliver the message.” Somehow he found the strength to clutch at Arran’s hand.

“I promise, I’ll do it in person,” Arran whispered.

“Promise me...” The voice trailed away as death engulfed him.

The enemy died in his arms and Arran cursed the heavens.

...excerpt...

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