

Prologue

*Adams House
Charles City, Virginia
February 17, 1898*

Liam Brown had been living at Adams House for two years that fateful day. The headlines for the Charles City Gazette read, “*Destruction of the War Ship Maine was the Work of an Enemy.*” Liam continued reading while sipping coffee by the fire in the dining room. The boarding house was owned by his cousin Belle and her husband, Jason Adams, and they had a two-year-old daughter named Victoria. Two days prior, there had been an explosion of the U.S.S. Maine, an American battleship, in the harbor of Havana, Cuba. The ship had been sent by President McKinley a month prior to protect U.S. citizens in Cuba. The Cubans wanted freedom from Spain, and some Americans were anxious for a war with Spain to help Cuba gain its independence.

Liam took another sip and tossed his unruly blonde hair off his forehead. He straightened out the newspaper and out of the corner of his eye spied the housemaid, Isabel, coming into the room with a tray full of food. Isabel was a beautiful Spanish woman who came to work at the boarding house around the same time Liam moved in. The former housemaid, Millie, had gotten married and moved out right after Christmas, and Isabel moved in shortly after. She was fairly quiet and kept to herself a lot but was respectful and seemed thankful to be living and working at Adams House. She did like to talk about cooking, something her *abuela*

taught her, she'd said. She said very little about her *familia* but the two people she talked about most were her sister and her grandmother.

"Ah, there's my favorite *chica*," he said, smiling at her. He was amused when she blushed. She had taught him a few Spanish words.

"Good morning, Señor Liam. Would you like some breakfast with your coffee?"

"Absolutely. What have you fixed me today?"

"Tostadas and bananas."

"Wonderful! Could you sweeten my coffee for me like only you know how to do? You know I can't make it the way you do."

She rolled her eyes at him and said, "Of course, Señor Liam."

He delighted in watching her move. She was the prettiest woman he had ever seen with shiny black hair, knotted at her nape at the moment, deep brown eyes, dark eyebrows, rosy lips, and skin that was faintly tan but perfect, without blemish. He had tried unsuccessfully for the past two years to get her to pay attention to him, even kissed her once, which she seemed to enjoy for a moment but then she had backed away. She had apologized and said that her heart belonged to another. It disappointed him a great deal, but that didn't keep him from trying.

She filled a cup halfway with cream, poured hot coffee over that, and then dropped in a cube of sugar. She stirred that with a little tiny silver spoon and handed it to him, their fingers touching in the process. His eyes went to hers, and she glanced at him momentarily but then kept her head down.

"Isabel, when are you going to forget about your other man and take a chance with me? We could go down to Rosie's some evening and share supper, get away from the house for a while. What do you say?"

"*Lo siento*, Señor Liam. I am sorry, but I cannot. You're a very handsome man, but I cannot."

He was pleased that she found him handsome. Maybe if he kept trying, he would wear her down and she would finally say yes someday.

She busied herself by placing tostados on a plate, cut up a banana, and poured some sweet syrup over top of it. She handed the plate to him.

"This looks delicious. Thank you," he said.

He looked up when she didn't reply and saw a horrified look on her face. She nearly dropped the plate before she let go of it, so he quickly took it from her hands.

“Isa? What is it?” he asked. He followed her eyes and saw that she was looking at the newspaper on the table.

“*Ay, Dios mío!*” She covered her mouth with her hand. “*Mi abuela!*” She made the sign of the cross with her hands, touching her forehead, chest, and then both shoulders. “*Mi familia!*”

“I’m sorry, Isabel. You have family there, don’t you?”

She nodded. She pointed her finger at some of the words written below a photograph of a ship with smoke rising into the sky. “What does this mean?” she asked him.

He read the line out loud, “Naval officers think the Maine was destroyed by a Spanish mine.” He looked at her and she looked at him earnestly. “They think Spain put a hidden mine on the ship.”

Her eyes got wide. “What could happen next? What will the Americans do?”

“I don’t know.” He noted that she referred to Americans as other people. She didn’t consider herself an American, it seemed.

She looked back at the newspaper. “It says some of the windows of nearby homes were broken, no?”

He looked at the newspaper again and saw where she read that. He nodded. “*Si.*”

“*¿Que les pasará a ellos?*” she said.

He didn’t understand what she meant. “What’s that?”

“What will happen to them? To my *familia*?”

“Does your family live in Havana?”

She nodded her head and continued to stare at the newspaper.

He didn’t know what to say. He continued reading and the article said that survivors told stories of men being blown into the air and of steel shattering and exploding shells for hours. It sounded like war. Liam’s father had told him many stories of the war he was part of as a young man, the War Between the States. War with Spain was definitely a possibility, but he wanted to allay Isabel’s fears and take away that worried look on her face.

He put his arm across her back and said, “Now, don’t you fret over this. You know how newspapers embellish the truth sometimes. Maybe it’s not as bad as it seems.”

He was proven wrong, however, as two months later, Spain declared war first, followed by the United States declaring war two days later.

Theodore Roosevelt was appointed lieutenant colonel of a new regiment to build up the Army. America was once again to be involved in war. This time, it was in a foreign country.

Liam was to be in this war.

Chapter One

*San Antonio, Texas
May 9, 1898*

It took Liam three days to get from Charles City, Virginia, to San Antonio, Texas, by train. It was a long, slow journey with stops in many towns and five transfers. Along the way, he started writing his first letter to his folks back at home, telling them about the trip.

His parents, William and Ginny Brown, were a medical team. His father was a doctor and his mother a nurse. They owned a Medical Clinic and Apothecary in Charles City, and Liam had developed an interest in medicine when he just a young boy. By the time he was five years old, he could already name most of the bones of the body. After his regular education, he attended the College of William and Mary in nearby Williamsburg, and then the Medical College of Virginia in Richmond where he obtained his doctorate degree.

His parents lived above the clinic during the weekdays and then traveled out to their plantation in the woods, Forest Plantation, for the weekends. Once Liam obtained his degree and had practiced under his father's direction, he started staying at the clinic and kept it open on the weekends. Wanting more independence, he moved into the boarding house, Adams House, which was within walking distance of the clinic. His cousin Godfrey Wellington had invited him to live across the river with him, but he had been newly married and he and his wife now had three children between them, so Liam didn't want to impose or be in the way.

One of Liam's instructors, Professor Lupin, had recommended Liam to join Theodore Roosevelt's new Army as an assistant surgeon. Liam jumped at the chance, wanting to do what he could to help free the Cuban people from the brutal treatment of Spain. He realized he was an ideal candidate because he was young, without a wife or children, and was especially interested in trauma surgery, something that was rarely needed in a small town like Charles City.

At first, his mother had refused to allow him to get involved in the war, but Liam's father convinced her that it would be good for "the lad" to stretch his legs a little and see the world before he settled down into married life. She argued that fighting in a war was not an ideal way to see the world, but his father won the battle, saying that he would gain rare combat experience that would be indispensable as a doctor when he returned. His mother hoped and prayed that he *would* return and when he did, she would find a fine woman for him to marry and settle down with.

Liam hadn't thought about marriage to any woman up to now, concentrating on medicine instead. The only woman to catch his eye had been the exotic Isabel, who still refused his advances, and yet she had surprised him before he left to catch the train.

"Would you write to me while you are in Cuba?" she'd asked him, her brown eyes imploring him.

"Yes, of course I will," he said.

She fidgeted with her white apron strings. "If I could, I would go with you," she said quietly.

He realized then that she missed her family dearly and wanted to be with them. He wondered what had happened to them and why she wasn't with them. "Do you want me to try and contact your family? Tell them where you are?" he'd asked her.

She shook her head. "No. I don't know exactly *dónde están*...where they are."

He promised to write and privately vowed to try and find out what he could about her family. At least he could tell them she was safe and in a good place.

She surprised him once more by placing a soft kiss on both cheeks and saying, "Take care, Liam."

He wrote her a letter after he wrote to his parents while on the train, telling her about his journey so far. While writing, he often looked away,

observing the other people on the train. Families with small children. Businessmen. Young men around his age, seeking adventures in the west. A couple obviously on their honeymoon.

In the dining car, he drank coffee and read newspapers with more updates about the war. One headline read, “Remember the Maine, to Hell with Spain!” It hadn’t been proven that Spain had sunk the battleship, but there was a cry for war from many American people. Two hundred sixty-six sailors had been killed on that ship and there was vengeance to pay. There was also talk of the Spaniards putting the Cubans in concentration camps and treating them horribly. Cuba wanted its freedom, and the U.S. wanted to help them achieve that.

Once Liam finally reached San Antonio, he gladly disembarked the rolling transportation and felt momentarily awkward at walking on flat land again. He was greeted with summery air, tall palm trees, and brilliant flowers. He took out his telegram to read the instructions on where he was supposed to go when someone plunked hard against the back of his head. He turned around quickly, preparing himself for a fight but was surprised to see a friend instead.

“Liam! What the hell are you doing here?” Rufus said.

Rufus Borders had attended medical school with Liam. He was tall and thin with dark brown hair, mustache, full beard and mischievous green eyes.

“Same thing as you, I’m guessing,” Liam said. The two men hugged each other briefly, patting each other’s backs.

“D’you get called up for Cuba?” Rufus asked.

Liam nodded. “I did.”

“What a small world we live in. Me, too. Can you believe this hot weather?”

Liam smiled. “It’s kind of nice. Anything beats being on a train for three days.”

“Sure does.”

“You still living in Middlesex County?” Liam asked. Rufus had been living with his parents in a house up on a hill overlooking the Rappahannock River.

“Up until three days ago I was.”

“Did you just get off the train?”

“Yes, I did. You, too?”

Liam laughed. “How did we miss each other?”

“I don’t know. It was a big train. Where do we go from here?”

Liam looked at his telegram again. “Says here we’re supposed to make our way to the Rough Rider camp at some old fairgrounds.”

“Hey, Rufus! Come on, we’re heading to the Menger,” some guy said, pulling Rufus’s bowler hat down over his forehead.

“Percy, hey. Meet my friend Liam.”

“Glad to meet you,” Liam said, shaking hands with the brown-haired man. He had a pleasant smile.

“Same here.” Percy looked back at Rufus. “A bunch of us are going to eat at the Menger before we head to the fairgrounds. Get our last good meal for a while. It’s supposed to be San Antonio’s finest hotel.”

“Great, let’s go then.”

The three of them paid for a hansom cab to take them to the hotel where they ate a nice meal for one dollar and then headed to the fairgrounds. They were joined by other males who had gone to college, including some who had attended Harvard. As they passed through the fairgrounds gate, cheers erupted for the “college boys.”

There were all manner of men from all different lifestyles at the camp: miners, stenographers, Ivy League football stars, Indians, champion polo players, electricians, carpenters, bakers, railroad workers, and of course cowboys. Men from all walks of life. Some were bilingual, speaking both Spanish and English, which would be helpful when they reached Cuba and interacted with both locals and the enemy.

The supplies had not yet arrived, and so Liam was glad his mother had packed his traveling bag with personal items he might need, including a coveted blanket. He shared it with Rufus that night as a big group of men bunked in a large hall. It wasn’t easy getting rest that night, however, as just when sleep came to Liam, someone threw a shoe at another guy, hitting him right in the head. Before anyone knew what was happening, shoes were flying all over. It was hard to get the men to settle down after that. Liam wondered just what he had gotten himself into but he was excited at the same time.

Chapter Two

*The Forest Plantation
Charles City County, Virginia
May 27, 1898*

“Did I tell you about the time when I was at the Battle of Chancellorsville in 1863?” William asked his children. He was sitting in the family parlor of his home surrounded by his three youngest children, Cate, who was thirteen, Shelly, who was ten, and his youngest son Tommy was seven. He had received a letter in the mail from Liam and they had gathered around to hear stories from the oldest son. Ginny came into the room carrying a tray of tea and cookies, followed by their oldest daughter Amelia, who was twenty-one. Amelia was studying to be a teacher like her grandmother, Catherine.

“Yes, Father, you’ve told us that one before,” Amelia answered.

“I want to hear it again,” Shelly said.

“I haven’t heard it,” Tommy said.

William settled into his war story. With Liam leaving for war in Cuba, it had sparked memories of his own time in the War Between the States. “Your cousin Ethan and I were sent to be on lookout for the enemy. A group of three bluecoats happened upon us before we saw them, and we tried to fight them off. Ethan took on a particularly big boy, and the other two came after me. One of them knifed me in the back and the other one pulled out his gun to shoot me, but Ethan shot him instead. The one who knifed me surrendered and dropped his knife. Ethan had knocked the big

guy out momentarily, so we took off. I got medical help for my wound, but Ethan and I were separated after that. They wouldn't let me leave when the troops moved on."

"I like that story," Tommy said. He pointed his fingers towards Shelly like he had a gun and then "Phew!" he said, pretending to shoot.

"Don't shoot me," Shelly whined.

"Tommy, don't pretend to shoot your sister," Ginny said.

"Did I tell you I had a Cherokee Indian friend during the war, who taught me how to make corn husk dolls and dream catchers?" William asked.

"Yes, Father. You made all of us a corn husk doll for Christmas one year," Cate said.

"Can you make me a dream catcher?" Tommy asked curiously. "What *is* a dream catcher?"

William laughed. "It's made of wood, string, beads and feathers. You hang it above your bed and it is said to keep bad dreams away."

"I have one," Amelia said. "It's packed away somewhere. I haven't thought about it in years."

"I've gotten so busy, I haven't made any in a long time," William said.

"Can we make one?" Tommy asked.

"Yes, of course."

"After you read Liam's letter," Ginny said.

"Yes, I apologize. I had nearly forgotten."

He opened the envelope, pulled out the letter, and began to read out loud.

San Antonio, Texas

May 20, 1898

Dear family,

It's been a long journey on the train to get to Texas. I never imagined it would be so far, and this is only halfway to California.

I met my friend from college here, Rufus. He has another friend, Percy, and the three of us have been learning our way around here in San Antonio. The weather is hot! Mother, you would love the tall palm trees and brilliant flowers. We had a good meal at a nice hotel before heading to the fairgrounds where we are camped.

When we first arrived, we had no supplies, so thanks, Mother, for the blanket and other supplies. We really needed them! We received our clothing in different shipments. Our uniforms are made of brown canvas which are cool, but the dark blue wool flannel pullovers are hotter than Hades! Our guns arrived yesterday, a Colt single-action Army revolver with a .45-caliber cartridge and a Krag-Jorgenson rifle that uses smokeless powder so we can stay more hidden. They also gave us machetes to train with, the same kinds that the Cubans use in the sugar fields. I was reluctant to take the weapons, telling them I'm here to heal people, not hurt them, so they took back the Krag, saying someone else could use it since they hadn't all arrived yet. They insisted I keep the revolver and machete though. We start training with them tomorrow.

A military band came to the camp and played patriotic songs for us. Roosevelt even came out and gave a short inspirational speech. We go into town by trolley sometimes for supplies like toothbrush and powder, soap, bandanas, writing paper and envelopes, and some of the boys like to get Durham tobacco and cigarette papers. We have to receive passes to leave camp. We went to see the Alamo and also swam in an indoor swimming pool. Some of the fellows go to the saloons and gamble at night. I have done neither, Mother, do not worry.

We finally moved out of the Exposition Building into tents today. It's a lot quieter now.

Well, the candle is burning low, so I will close for now. I will write to you again soon.

Love and kisses to you all,

Liam

William closed the letter back up and Ginny wiped the corner of her eye. "Our boy is all grown up," she said, sniffing.

He handed her the letter and kissed her temple. "That he is." He took a sip of tea and thought about the War Between the States again. "Did I ever tell you about the time when your cousin Judy was a spy?" Judy was his Aunt Patsy's daughter.

"A spy?" Ginny asked, surprised. "You've never told me that. During the war?"

"I only heard the story secondhand, of course, as I was off fighting myself, and Judy could tell the story much better than I."

"But Judy's not here. Come on, out with it," Ginny insisted.

"Yes, please tell us, Father," Tommy said.

“There were women spies in the war?” Cate asked, her eyes wide open.

“Sure there were,” William answered. He turned back to Ginny. “She waited many years to tell me the whole story, as she felt guilty at some things that had happened.”

He let his mind wander back on the story Judy had confessed to him.

Petersburg, Virginia
June 1864

Judy Wheeler was just fifteen years old when the War Between the States began in 1861. By 1863, her father, two brothers, and cousin had all gone off to war, and she and her mother lived alone at their family home in Petersburg. They had a two-story brick home on the Appomattox River with several dependencies. In June 1864, they had only five slaves left to help out on their farm, a married man and woman and their three children. It was just after the Emancipation Proclamation, but they agreed to stay on and help the two women until after the war. By this time, Judy was eighteen.

One fateful day, a lone soldier stumbled onto their front porch. Judy was the one who found him half-lying there on the steps, out of breath and bleeding from his stomach. He was wearing a dark blue jacket wrapped loosely around him on the warm morning. His dirty blonde hair was disheveled, as he was without a hat, and he had dirt on his face and hands. His shoes had holes in them. At first, Judy was scared, not knowing what to do with this strange man.

“Please...water,” the man begged, having difficulty speaking.

Judy quickly jumped off the porch and ran to the cistern, glad to put some distance between her and the Yankee soldier. Compassion overtook her fear, however, and she drew up a ladle-full of water and took it carefully back to the man.

“Here, drink some,” she told him.

He took the ladle from her hands and nearly spilled it all over his face in his urgent efforts to drink.

“Take it easy. There’s plenty more where that came from,” she told him.

He finished the ladle and handed it back to her. “Thank you.”

She took it from him. “You’re hurt. Won’t you come inside and let me have a look at your abdomen?”

“No, I cannot.” The man looked down at his bleeding wound. “I know you must think I’m a Yank, but I swear to you I’m not. I’ve been spying on the Yankees. I’m actually from South Carolina.”

Judy noted that the man did have a Southern accent.

“I have plans in my pocket concerning the Yankees’ next move in the form of a letter, which needs to get to a Confederate colonel as soon as possible.” He paused and looked around nervously. “The Yankees are following me. I was shot by one of them in a skirmish before I could get into the woods. Unfortunately, they found out I’m a spy.”

Judy eyed him suspiciously, unsure whether or not to believe his story.

“If you’re a Confederate, why won’t you come into my house? Our slave woman will know what to do for you. She’s very capable. Ex-slave, excuse me.”

“I don’t want to put you and your household in danger. I simply needed a drink of water. How far is it to the river?”

“It’s down the hill behind our house, but you’re in no condition to make it there. Please let me at least help you to the slaves’ quarters. They can hide you there and take care of that wound.”

The man doubled over in pain and groaned. “Yes,” he said, nodding his head. “That’ll be fine.”

“Just one thing,” Judy said.

“What’s that?”

“May I have your name?”

“It’s Isaiah, ma’am.”

She extended her arm to shake his hand. “Pleased to meet you, Isaiah. I’m Judy.”

He reached into his pocket. “Please, Miss Judy, could you do one more thing for me?”

“What’s that?” Fear struck her suddenly, as she thought he was reaching for a gun.

Instead, he pulled out an envelope. “Could you hold this for me, in case I don’t make it? It’s of utmost importance that it goes to that man’s name on the envelope, for the safety of our Southern men.”

She turned the envelope over and read the name, Colonel Jackson.

“Yes, I’ll keep this for you until you are well enough to move on.”

