

Name: Christina (Teany) Watson

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## XII

### The Slave Woman at the Tavern<sup>1</sup>

I WAS the cook at Delaney's Tavern hyar in Sharpsburg when the battle was fought. That was a big time, yes, a big time, and I never want to see no such time again.

The day befo' the battle the two armies was jest a-feelin' for one another. That was on a Tuesday. The Rebels was keepin' the Yankees back while mo' of their men was crossin' the Potomac.

In the evenin' the tavern family was all in the kitchen when a young feller come in and asked for somethin' to eat. My old boss said: "We ain't got nothin' fo' our own selves. You soldiers have e't us all out."

The feller went out the do', and it wasn't ten minutes befo' the barn was a-fire. The men jest had to get up on top of the house and spread wet blankets all over the roof to keep the tavern from burning. We couldn't save the barn. That burnt down to the ground, and the chickens and everything in it was burnt up. Oh! it was an awful time.

General Lee come to the house early the next morning. He was a fine-lookin' man, and he was the head general of 'em all in the Rebel army, you know. Our old boss was a Democrat, too; so he gave the general his breakfast. But while the officers was eatin' there in the dining-room a shell come right thoo the wall and busted and scattered brick and daubin' all over everything. There was so much dirt you couldn't tell what was on the table. I was bringin' in coffee from the kitchen and had a cup and saucer in my hand. I don't know where I put that coffee, but I throwed it away, and we all got out of there in a hurry.

#### *GENERAL LEE'S BREAKFAST IS INTERRUPTED*

I went out to the gate. An old colored man was comin' down the pavement with an iron pot on his head. He said the Yankees had got the Rebels on the run, and there'd be fightin' right in the town streets. He was goin' to get away, and he was carryin' that pot so he'd have somethin' to cook in.

Pretty soon I was back workin' in the kitchen, but the soldiers told me I'd better get out, and then all of us in the house went into the cellar. We carried boards down there and spread carpets on 'em and took chairs down to set on. There was seven or eight of us, white and black, and we was all so scared we didn't know what we was doin' half the time. They kept us in the cellar all day while they was fightin' backwards and forwards. My goodness alive! there was cannon and everything shootin'. Lord 'a' mercy, man! we could hear 'em plain enough. The cannon sounded jest like thunder, and the small-arms the same as pop-guns. Sometimes we'd run up and look out

of a window to see what was happening, but we didn't do that often — not the way them guns was firin'.

By and by word was sent in for the women and children to all leave town. That was about — le's see — between ten and 'leven o'clock, I reckon. We went out on the street, and there lay a horse with his whole backbone split wide open. The ambulances was comin' into town, and the wounded men in 'em was hollerin', "O Lord! O Lord! O Lord!"

Poor souls! and the blood was runnin' down thoo the bottom of the wagons. Some of the houses was hospitals, and the doctors was cuttin' off people's legs and arms and throwin' 'em out the do' jest like throwin' out old sticks.

We hadn't gone only a couple of houses when a shell busted right over our heads. So we took back to the cellar in a hurry. The way they was shootin' and goin' on we might have been killed befo' we was out of town.

After they'd fit all day and it got to be night they ceased fightin' and wasn't doin' much shootin', and then we come up and got a little mouthful of food. We didn't have nothin' to eat in the cellar, and, indeed, we was glad to be there ourselves, and wasn't botherin' about no dinner or no supper.

At last the Rebels retreated and we heard 'em hollerin'. I spoke to one of 'em who was passin', and said, "Did you have a hard fight to-day?"

"Yes, Auntie," he said, "the Yankees give us the devil, and they'll give us hell next."

I went in the house and laid down, but I couldn't sleep none because I didn't know when they'd break in on me. Oh Lordy! that was a squally time — squally, squally time — squally time, sure!

The Rebels all got away the next morning early. They run in every direction. You couldn't hardly tell what direction they wasn't runnin' to get across the Potomac into Virginia.

We was afraid there would be mo' fightin', and we went out of the town tereckly and stayed with a farmer till the next day. My old boss got a pass. There was pickets all along the road who would stop you. Yes, sir, they stopped every one that come along and asked where they was goin' to. We come home Friday, and then we had everything to clean up. But we thanked the Lord we wasn't killed, and we didn't mind the dirt.

Well, my time is pretty near out now. I can't do a day's work no mo', and I jest have to depend on the mercy of people. I'm goin' on eighty-seven years old, and I'm pretty near blind and can't hardly see any one. I have to go around with a cane, and mostly I jest set in my chair and do nothin'.

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<sup>1</sup> She was seated in her rocking-chair in her tiny sitting-room with a little shawl over her turbaned head. Her mind was still clear, but her body was bent and decrepit. A cat lay sleeping on the lounge, opposite the lounge was a table on which a family Bible was conspicuous. The walls of the room were adorned with a few framed photographs including an enlarged portrait, and there was a colored representation of the crucifixion, a picture of Lincoln, and one of Wilkes Booth with the devil looking over his shoulder.