

Chapter One

Scavenger

Port Republic, Virginia
June 9, 1862

The sun's defiant rays poked through the clouded sky and the lingering smoke that still hugged the ground. A gold flash of light dared to answer.

Woody's watery hazel eyes burned and itched, so he swiped an arm across his stubbly face, leaving traces of red on his tattered sleeve. Blood gushed from his head. The ground beneath him blurred and the drumbeat in his head pounded with increasing intensity, as if he had just awoken from an alcoholic binge.

He stumbled toward the mysterious gleam, now wondering if his mind had played a trick. After all, he could barely think straight, and remembered only bits and pieces of the last few hours. He had dodged countless ground-shaking explosions all around him, and charged headlong toward the mouths of ear-splitting cannons that rained death and grave injuries on his comrades. That much he remembered.

The big guns had since been quieted, but the high-pitched ringing they left in his ears threatened to drive him to his knees.

A gentle voice sounded as he approached the patch of ground that had yielded the light. The words rang clear: *Find my family, and I will grant peace to your battle-weary soul.* A child's plea had somehow drowned out the ringing and pathetic moans of grown men calling out for their mamas. But this was impossible. He scanned the area. With the exception of a brave young drummer boy, staring heavenward with vacant eyes, there were no other children here. Thankfully. Nobody here could have uttered those innocent words. Did he imagine them?

The dead boy couldn't have been older than thirteen. His shattered drum lay by his side. Way too young for a lad to die. Woody thought about the comforting touch and the warm responses of his mother during the worst of his illnesses and injuries growing up. This boy's mother would soon be devastated that she could not be there at her son's greatest hour of need. Woody mourned for her loss. As he took a knee to close the boy's eyes, an earthquake was loosened in his brain. His legs wobbled under the strain.

He had to concentrate. Where was he? A wheat field...where? The pounding in his head made it hard to think. What had happened in this place? Woody touched his hand to the top of his head. A fistful of blood covered his palm. A blunt force of some sort had gashed his scalp.

A crimson stream flowed among several soldiers lying prostrate around him. Mangled bodies torn and twitching, and, in a few cases, dismembered.

Where was Lucas?

Suddenly, he remembered. He was in Port Republic, Virginia. The Stonewall Brigade had engaged the blue-clad army that had invaded the precious Vale of Shenandoah.

Private Jonathan "Woody" Woodard recalled mere shadows of the dance between rivals, but he shuddered at the visual aftermath. He finally found the source of the peculiar light...a shiny object that lay between the bodies of a Yank and a fellow Confederate. The enemies faced each other locked in an eerie death stare. They appeared to have killed one another in the same instant.

Despite his mental fog, words filtered through the doorway of his memory: "And God said, let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and

let them be for signs...”

As Woody stooped down between the bodies, the pressure in his head overwhelmed him. Wobbly, he managed to pick up the article whose bright gleam had beckoned him from across the field of bodies. The ornate gold cover fit in the palm of his hand. He had never seen such an elaborate piece. Was it European? The top had a decorative design of foliage and flowers. He balanced himself and opened the cover to reveal an ambrotype of a child. Before he could examine the image, his vision began to dissolve.

A familiar voice rang out from behind. And then everything around him turned black as a raven