

Belle
BOY

A SISTER IN THE REBEL RANKS

∞ A NOVEL ∞

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↳ A NOVEL ↻

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To the two men who never doubted,
my dad and my husband

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AUTHOR'S NOTE



The Civil War took place from 1861-1865. At this point in American history, women were not allowed to vote, they did not go to college, and they absolutely did not fight in wars—or so everyone thought. Evidence shows there were women who traded in their skirts for uniforms; but for many years both sides of the conflict denied any known female soldiers.

There were, in fact, several women who went to battle in the Civil War. Actual numbers are not known, because the women who left home to join the fight assumed men's names, and many were never discovered. It is currently believed there were around 400 women serving under assumed names between the Union and the Confederate armies. Experts and historians believe that records will never reflect an exact count.

Why did the men not notice? A common theory is that women were not expected to be seen in uniform (remember that at this time all women wore dresses), so

the men in camp saw what they expected to see—another man. Another theory is that the idea of women fighting was so foreign the men couldn't recognize a female soldier.

One of my favorite true stories of a woman in the Civil War is that of Jennie Hodgers, a.k.a. Albert Cashier. She joined the union army in 1862 and was assigned to the 90th Illinois. In the summer of 1865 her regiment was disbanded and in her hometown "Albert" received a standing ovation for fighting. It should be noted that no one in her hometown knew she was a woman since she began her masquerade before she had moved there. She continued to masquerade as a man for the next 42 years and even received an invalid soldier's pension before she was discovered. If you would like to read more about "Albert," read the book *They Fought Like Demons* by Deanne Blanton and Lauren M. Cook.

There are also several instances of women joining up with husbands, brothers, or fathers to go to war. After their relative was killed in battle, they admitted to their commanding officer their true gender—there was no reason to stay once their loved one was gone.

Modern excavations of the mass graves from the Civil War have revealed skeletons that scientists believe are women as evidenced by their smaller bone structure and other gender-identifying differences. This evidence underlines the fact that we will never truly know how many women disguised themselves and fought during the Civil War.

I spend many of my days researching and reading about the Civil War; and I often dream and wonder about these women who joined the armed forces during this difficult war. They went against the expectations of the time and lived through much hardship. How would it have been and would it have been worth it to change your whole identity to fight in the Civil War?

Thank you for joining me for this story. I hope you enjoy reading about Samantha Anne as much as I enjoyed writing about her! Feel free to write to me if you have any questions about the characters in this book.

PROLOGUE



Gwinnett County, Georgia

July 1863

The sound of hooves could be heard on the hard packed dirt of the drive in front of the house. I went to the top of the stairs to see my father coming through the big front door. I gathered the skirt of my worn nightgown and ran down the steps to him.

Meeting him on the threshold I grabbed his arm and asked impatiently, “What did you find out? Where is he?”

For a moment Father’s gray eyes looked blankly into mine and I could see the worried lines etched in his gaunt face. His face had once been full and vital; it was now tired and bleak.

“Samantha Anne,” Mother’s voice—full of disapproval—came from the doorway of the parlor behind me. “A

lady does not clutch at a gentleman, nor does she come downstairs in her night clothes!”

I turned to look at my mother with her grim face, her lips pulled into a tight line of irritation, her hair pulled severely back from her face, her dress impeccable despite the lateness of the hour. My mother often scolded and corrected me. Usually, I would have been upset at my mother’s words, but tonight I knew her sharpness was rooted in the same anxiety I was feeling. We were both anxious over the unknown whereabouts of my older brother.

My three older sisters were everything my mother wanted in daughters. Girls who loved to play with their dolls and have tea parties with miniature china tea sets. As they got older, they took Mother’s lessons on what was proper very seriously. All had grown into genteel young ladies who had further pleased Mother by entering excellent marriages with highly eligible men.

When the youngest of my sisters was seven, my brother, Johnny, was born. Since my parents had given up hope of having any more children, he was doted on shamelessly by the entire family. Part of this devotion was due to the fact that he was the son both my father and mother had always wanted. Imagine everyone’s surprise when three years later I was born.

Since Johnny and I were so close in age, it was natural for me to shadow and imitate Johnny rather than my older sisters. Besides, they were much more interested in hairstyles and the fashion of their dresses than whatever

their baby sister might want to play. As a result, I'd spend my time fishing, climbing trees, and preferring mud pies over pretend teacakes.

Johnny and I were great friends, and that friendship didn't change even as we got older and our interests diverged. Mine, even shocking myself, to hairstyles and his to the rumors of a possible armed battle with the North.

When the South started mustering regiments to fight in the battle for state's rights, Johnny joined up as soon as he could. Thinking it would be a short time before I'd see him again, I laughingly told him to get a Yank for me. In my naiveté about battle, I didn't really realize what I was telling him. Johnny had lamented he was so late already that he'd probably never see any action at all.

Months turned into years. What I thought would be a few small battles became a war, full of worry for those of us still at home. Johnny continued to write letters, and he had even come home for furlough a couple of times. Furloughs were leaves of absence granted by the army to the soldiers. Every soldier's family looked forward to his furlough, especially since they were granted infrequently.

When Johnny came home, I found that my handsome, reckless, and somewhat spoiled brother was growing up. He was still handsome and fun, but there was a new seriousness in his eyes and in the letters he sent home. After every rumored battle, we waited impatiently for news—casualty lists or a letter from a commander or comrade that something had happened.

Johnny wrote often and usually soon after a battle. We knew by the receipt of his letter that he had come through another conflict unharmed. However, after the news of a horrible battle in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, we didn't get the usual reassuring letter from my brother. Instead, in the newspaper under the heading "Missing in Action" was my brother's name: Jonathon Davis, Georgia 35th Infantry.

I was horrified and devastated. Seeing Johnny's name listed in that newspaper meant no one knew where my brother was. He could be in some prison behind Yankee lines, he could be in a hospital—unconscious and injured with other hurt men. Or he could be in a mass grave of unknown Confederate soldiers buried somewhere in Pennsylvania.

I didn't let myself dwell on the last option because I believed in my heart Johnny was alive. My father believed it too, and had just spent several days tracking every lead he could find. I had hoped that when he came home tonight, he would be able to tell us where he'd found Johnny.

"I didn't find him," Father answered, ignoring what Mother and I had just said. "I went to everyone I could, pulled all the favors I was owed and still I have no idea where Johnny might be."

Mother came over and took Father's arm, the one that I was not already holding. She gently said, "Come, Jacob, come and sit. We'll get you something warm to drink and you can tell us all about it."

Together we steered him into the parlor and helped him sit down on the worn couch. Mother sat next to him and patted the stiff fingers of his right hand. “Now, tell us what you found out about Johnny.”

Father shook his head. “No one knows where Johnny is. I went as far up the chain of command as I could. Did you know there is even a department in the army whose only job is to locate the lost and the wounded? They are trying to locate so many lost men, they haven’t even started thinking about the lists that have come out from Gettysburg.”

Father continued bitterly. “I’ve asked a hundred questions, but everything is in an uproar. There are more wounded than the doctors can handle. With supply problems and not enough men to fulfill the army’s needs, very few people—even those who are friends—have time to address the demands of so many families. Johnny is just one of many who is missing in action.

“Some have deserted no doubt, and some are wounded. The records are a mess, but most of the missing are either dead on a battlefield somewhere or in a prison camp up North. No one wants to say it, but it is as clear as day that everyone I talked to thinks that we won’t ever see Johnny again.”

I was reeling with shock and discouragement. I had been sure Father would find out something—anything.

Father went on, massaging his stiff right hand. “If it weren’t for this bum hand of mine, I’d join up and find him myself.”

“How, Father?” I asked.

Mother interrupted, “Samantha Anne, go to the kitchen and ask Hettie to make up a pot of coffee for your father! Tell her she can use the last of the coffee that we have been saving. We might as well drink it up.”

Hettie was one of our servants. She’d been with the family since before I was born. Every time my parents wanted me out of the way, they sent me to run an errand. I wanted to hear whatever Father and Mother were going to say next.

“Yes, Mother,” I replied meekly and headed out the parlor door.

Upon leaving the parlor, I dragged my feet. I waited to see if Father’s comment would be explained. I didn’t have to wait long before I heard Mother say, “Jacob, you could not have found out any more by joining up.”

“Yes I could have!” replied my father. “I would have gotten as close to his regiment as possible. Others were out there with Johnny during the fighting. They would have seen him. If we could find out what happened there on the field, there is a chance we could determine where he went from there. A twenty-two-year-old man does not just disappear.”

“I thought you had a letter sent to Frank asking if he had seen Johnny during the battle.”

“My brother hasn’t seen fit to reply.”

Deep in thought, I walked back to the kitchen and found Hettie. I told her Mother wanted coffee for Father. This would be our last pot of coffee, and it would be

weak and taste odd since we hadn't been drinking real coffee for months due to the war. No one could get coffee anymore. As Hettie began making the coffee, I went up the back stairs to my room. I was thinking about what Father had said.

The army wouldn't take Father because his right hand was completely immobile from a hunting accident that had occurred when he was a boy. His left hand was incredibly stiff due to painfully swollen joints. He did as much as he could with his left hand, but it was difficult for him to grasp anything. There was little chance that he would be able to pull the trigger on a musket.

The army was taking almost anyone they could get— young boys and old men. From what I could tell by the men who were being drafted from the area, you just had to be able to load and fire a gun to get in.

When I reached my room, I looked in the mirror and pulled my hair up behind my head. I had braided my straight, long hair before I went to bed last night, and now I studied myself critically. My eyes were gray like Father's. I had just a dusting of freckles over the tip of my nose, which had concerned me before the war started. But then I had come to know there were things that were really important to worry about, and freckles wasn't one of them. Not when loved ones were fighting and dying and food was scarce.

My hair was thick, a deep dark brown without any wave or curl. I would not have described myself as beautiful or even overly feminine looking. Taking a more critical look

at myself, I felt a bolt of confidence that I could pass for an adventurous boy. True, I wasn't as tall as most boys my age, but I could probably pass for a fourteen-year-old boy. Father couldn't go into the army, but I could.



I started my transformation from nineteen-year-old girl to fourteen-year-old boy by digging through Johnny's chest of drawers. I found an old pair of pants and a shirt that fit me decently. They were a little big, but I figured big was better than too tight. With baggy clothes, no one would be able to tell that I had curves in all the wrong places. Just to be sure, I wound a long piece of soft cloth around my chest, binding myself to look more like a man.

Next, I took a pair of sharp scissors and, with a small sigh of regret, chopped off the two braids on each side of my head. My thick brown hair was my one true vanity, even if it wouldn't hold a curl for any length of time. The cropped locks on my head were uneven and choppy, making me look like a scarecrow—but it would be worth it if I could locate my big brother.

As I trimmed at the remnants of my hair, working for a smoother style, I pondered on what name I should give

to the army. As desperate as the army was for soldiers, they were not accepting girls.

Christopher? Snip. No, I'll never remember to answer to that. Snip, snip. Think of one closer to Samantha. Snip. Steven? Snip. I'm not sure I'd remember to answer to that. Snip, snip. Stanley? Snip. At least that is closer to Sam... Pause, the scissors hovering at my hairline. Naturally, Sam. Johnny always called me Sammie Annie; now I'll be Samuel.

Pleased with my decision I finished working on my hair. The effort was not entirely successful, but I felt I looked more boy than girl now.

Finally, after pulling on the smallest pair of boots I could find in Johnny's closet, and packing a few necessary things in an old knapsack, I shoved a cap over my now short hair and tiptoed to the kitchen.

The kitchen was dark, so Hettie must have gone to bed. I scrounged up some food from the pantry, left a note to Mother and Father in the middle of the table, and snuck out the back door into the night. I was on my way to join the Confederate army in hopes of finding my older brother, Johnny Davis.

I felt a bolt of confidence that
I could pass for an adventurous boy.
Father couldn't go into the army ...
but I could.

WHEN SAMANTHA ANNE'S BROTHER, JOHNNY, GOES missing-in-action while fighting for the Confederate army, she takes on the responsibility of finding him herself. Lucky for her, she grew up tagging along with Johnny and his friends, doing things a proper Southern Belle should never do. These skills come in handy as she disguises herself to join the rebel ranks.

Between fierce and bloody battles, she searches the tired, filthy faces of soldiers looking for Johnny. Along the way, her life is forever changed by the difficult choices she is forced to make, the horrors of war she shares with her fellow soldiers, and the courage she discovers within.



“Anne Fuller expertly weaves fascinating historical facts throughout her story ... a novel about a courageous sister’s quest for her missing brother during the Civil War.”

~Alison Hart, *Gabriel’s Horses*,
book one in the *Racing to Freedom* trilogy



Anne Fuller is an avid researcher of Civil War history and lore. She loves to write, and believes that younger readers always enjoy a wholesome story, filled with interesting characters.

Includes
Discussion
Questions!



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