



Emily Meier is a fiction writer whose grandmother was born and grew up in New Harmony. Meier has published many short stories, including one that was anthologized in *The Second Penguin Book of Modern Women's Short Stories*. She has won numerous writing awards, including a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. The following two excerpts are from her novel, *Suite Harmonic: A Civil War Novel of Rediscovery*, which is based on national and local documents and has a homefront in New Harmony. *Suite Harmonic* will be published in ebook form on July 16, 2011, with the paperback edition available on August 5, 2011. For more information, including ordering details, go to www.emilymeier.com or www.skyspinnerpress.com.

From Chapter Eight of *Suite Harmonic*

(The location is Pittsburg Landing, Tennessee, Late March, 1862, after the Battle of Fort Donelson and just before Shiloh.)

John started up the muddy track which was lined with stacks of boxes and barrels and filled with drivers bawling at their teams. He could hear the drums in the distance and smell bread baking in the field ovens. Mice scooted through piles of unhusked corn. He watched as a flock of goats romped on a hillock. He'd taken the branch that the soldier had told him to, but in a while he started to wonder about the directions. Then he passed a thicket of trees, and the first thing he saw was Captain Rheinlander's company. The men were eating. John was starved, and he wanted to head straight for his own company while there was food left, but he made his way to the officers' tents to report for duty to Captain Saltzman. He found him drinking coffee in front of a tent and leaning intently over a paper-strewn table with Lieutenant Randolph and Sergeant Bennett.

John waited. In New Harmony, Captain Saltzman was a boss blacksmith descended from a Rappite follower and as well acquainted and well regarded as any man. He'd been the marshal for the 4th of July parade before Company A left for Evansville, and he'd formed Company A himself, training the men for weeks. On a warm and dusty May day, he'd called them to meet in the Methodist Church where he lectured on the manual of arms and where John felt strange and heretical simply by being there. He was "Wash" to his good friends (George *Washington* Saltzman) and Mr. Saltzman to other people, but in the company, his role was clear. He was Captain Saltzman, an absolute rock who meant that Company A had come into the field not only well drilled but with its share of rifled muskets that could shoot straight.

John saw that the captain, looking up, had noticed him. He straightened and saluted. "Private Given reporting for duty, sir," he said.

There were salutes back from the officers and handshakes and then Captain Saltzman put

down his coffee and, in an impulse that totally surprised John, hoisted him up in a bear hug. “Eat something, John,” he said, putting him back down. “How’s the leg? You got Levi with you? I thought you were worse off than Levi. I thought he’d come with you.”

“Levi was worse,” John said quickly. “You wouldn’t find him at all fit for service, sir, although he’s much better.”

He did eat something then. He found his friends in the company and they swarmed him for letters. George Tretheway, who was brother to worrying Mrs. Cawthorne in New Harmony, looked as fat and healthy as if he’d never been wounded. The rest of the boys wanted to know about Harmony and about their folks and about the girls. Particularly the girls. John made up stories as fast as he could, marrying off as many girls as he could think of to wealthy widowers or old bachelors from Mount Vernon and Kentucky until the boys started pummeling him and grabbing at his knapsack for more mail. Laughing, John held his arms up to fend them off. He was glad to be back. He was in a world familiar all of itself—a world tricked out with ranks and insignia and tent villages as though it were all pretend, as if the real Secesh didn’t shoot at them and maim and kill them, and where nobody came down with the camp quickstep and the best food anywhere was beans cooked for an entire day over hot coals in a hole in the ground.

From Chapter Thirty One, *New Harmony, Indiana*, February 2, 1880
(Kate is John’s sister and the novel is her story, too.)

Union Hall was brightly lit. Seeing it as she walked up Tavern Street and wondering if the girls of the town had begun decorating for Valentine’s Day, Kate thought her evening errand had actually started three years ago. She closed her eyes a second. Yes, it was three. It had been the fifteenth anniversary of the battle of Fort Donelson, and they’d all convinced John to attend the ball marking the date. Kate knew he hadn’t wanted to go, but Eugene Owen had made it very plain to him that he and George Tretheway and Robert Clarke were to be honored again for their battle wounds. Reluctant as John clearly was, he couldn’t say no. He and Harry had gone to the tavern with the other veterans before the ball started and, when Kate arrived at the hall, Church Street had been filled with buggies and with ladies dressed in their best gowns, supper baskets in tow. Harry and John were walking up the street with Robert Clarke. Along with Robert, John was dressed in his uniform and, thanks to their mother’s mending and the few pounds he’d gained, Kate thought it looked far better than when he’d returned from the war.

Inside that evening, it had been clear the town girls had outdone themselves. The hall was illuminated with white tapers in red, heart-shaped shades, and the walls were lined with various booths. There was a kissing booth and a booth to buy fancy valentines, both of them meant to raise money for disabled veterans. Kate had spotted a booth displaying memorabilia of the Fort Donelson battle and of the men who had died there. She had been interested in all of it, and she was interested in what Harry had to say. While they danced, he told her about the conversation at the tavern. It had gotten hot about the election, he said. The electoral college was ready to vote, and most of the men thought Hayes would win over Tilden, that in the end there would be a compromise to appease the South by withdrawing Federal troops. Captain Boren, back from California and working as a commercial traveler was beside himself, insisting that if the troops left, the country could just as well forget the slaves had ever been emancipated.

“I told him I spent enough life and leg on the South. I don’t care anymore,” Harry said, and Kate had shushed him, for the band had stopped and Colonel Owen had started his remarks. When it was John’s turn to be acknowledged, he spoke simply, thanking everyone for their kindness and saying a ball was a far better way to spend Valentine’s Day than the way he and George and Robert had spent it fifteen years ago. Then he’d offered a salute to the men whose hearts had stopped on that bloody field—those men and their brothers who had never come home.