



www.merlynspen.com

## R.E. Lee

Do they think it was worth this? I wonder, looking out over what is left of the battlefield. They are the winners, but do they think it was worth this?

My eyes widen, and I take deep, even breaths. I am a hardened soldier, and if I am shocked by this, what had they felt, those children who died down there?

The scents and sights of death fill my senses, threatening to overwhelm me. I feel nausea rise and roll. Soon I will no longer be able to breathe, but I do not turn away. They deserve more than that.

I am standing on a hill overlooking what is left of a peach orchard. Our last desperate effort to take Gettysburg was here—Pickett's Charge. Idly, I wonder about Pickett, a good man. I hadn't seen him among either the survivors or the wounded, and I am unwilling to paw among the dead. Is he down there, his husk lying forgotten and alone, yet among so many others?

The scene, which my mind tries to deny, lulls me into a kind of stupor. None of this is real. It's a dream, a nightmare. So many men, good men, could not be dead! My assistant, Private Clark. They told me he was dead. That proves they were lying. Clark couldn't be dead: I saw him just yesterday. He was so alive. Alive and eager and young. So many of them . . . so young.

I awake from my trance with painful clarity. We are going to bury the dead this morning. I turn away. This is enough to drive a man mad.

Helplessness engulfs me; I can speak of this with no one. The others, they don't realize yet, but I do. We're going to lose this war. We will keep on, in vain, fighting and hoping and praying.

Praying? My mouth twists into a caricature of a smile. Praying? What God would let this happen?

Bitterness burns my throat. But do I have a right to be bitter? I abandoned my home, my school, my friends—everything—for this cause. And I would do it again. I would leave and fight and put myself through all of this again.

Merlyn's Pen

“

Everyone has talent. What is rare is the courage to follow the talent to the dark place where it leads.

”

-Erica Jong

# MERLYN'S PEN

www.merlynspen.com

I rub my forehead. The pain that has been gnawing there, growing there, the last hour or so, expands to enormous proportions. It throbs there, a living thing. I will dream of them tonight.

I will see every one of the dead troop through my mind, and I will make a notch in my heart for every one that passes, until there is nothing left but pain. Mine is the pain they suffered, the pain the wounded now suffer, the pain the parents and sweethearts, the brothers and sisters will suffer when news of this reaches them.

Again, I rub my head and close my eyes.

My thoughts are abruptly jerked to the present by a young, clear, but tentative voice.

"Sir? General Lee, sir?" He is very young—can't be more than 14. But even he is not unscathed. There is a bloody makeshift bandage over his left eye, and his arm is in a dirty sling.

"Sir?" His voice is now even more tentative, and I realize I have not spoken to him yet, and he has probably been standing there for some minutes. I berate myself for intimidating him even more. Though he seems quite recovered, I can see horror in the back of his eyes, and I know the debilitating scars this battle will leave on him. I will not be the only one with nightmares tonight.

"Private?" I say, my tone soft but unemotional. I can put no emotion into it, because all of my emotions are raging within me, each of them fighting for recognition.

"They're starting to bury the men, sir." His statement hits me like cannonade. I had forgotten. The last rites for the fallen men. The burials. I have to preside over them.

I turn, warring within, yet, I hope, giving the Private the impression that Robert E. Lee is a strong, responsible man, one that he can depend on.

And I do not turn away from the fallen. They deserve more than that.

—Sandy Hall,  
Eighth grade, Deerfield-Windsor School,  
Albany, Georgia

Merlyn's Pen

“

Everyone has talent. What is rare is the courage to follow the talent to the dark place where it leads.

”

—Erica Jong