

*Hope's  
Promise*

Stacy Henrie

AN OF LOVE AND WAR SHORT STORY

# HOPE'S PROMISE

*An Of Love and War Short Story*

By Stacy Henrie

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Cover art and layout by Peter Henrie.

*France, May 1919*

Alice Thornton squinted in the bright afternoon sunlight as she surveyed the devastation before her. “It’s unbelievable.” She swallowed the rising emotion in her throat. Her five companions, four other Army Nurse Corps nurses and a surgeon, murmured in shocked agreement.

Mounds of rubble, roofless walls, the shelled church—each stood in stark contrast to the happy warble of birds in the distance and the new spring grass attempting to grow among the fallen bricks and stones. The war had imprinted itself on the town’s every available surface, leaving nothing but destruction in its wake. And yet, life was slowly returning.

“I think I’ll look around.” Alice stepped forward, moving with reverential steps. The others followed silently after a moment.

A feeling of solemnity hung over the shattered town and buildings. And rightly so. How many men had fallen here? Alice wondered as she walked up the uneven road. Men who hadn’t lived long enough to arrive at a hospital, such as St. Vincent’s where she’d worked before being transferred to a hospital in Germany.

Not for the first time she sent a prayer of gratitude heavenward that her three older brothers had survived the war. At least physically.

Having cared for countless soldiers during her time overseas, Alice knew all too well that some of the worst wounds, the ones hardest to heal, were deep and unseen. She hadn't been able to irrigate these wounds with Dakin's solution to prevent them from festering. She couldn't bandage them or assist in surgery to have them removed. She'd only been able to offer her forthright kindness in hopes of easing these lacerations to the soul.

A keen sense of melancholy rose within her as she stopped to stare at the charred ruins of a nearby house. No wonder the soldiers who'd left her wards to return to the front or to travel back home still possessed a haunted look in their eyes. She couldn't imagine being thrust into the middle of something as ugly and deadly as the battle here must have been.

"It makes me want to weep," her friend Maryanne Witcomb said with a shake of her head. "Perhaps I should have stayed on the train with the others."

They'd obtained special permission to stop and see some of the battle sites during their journey to the coast where they'd eventually board a ship for home. But after passing through No Man's Land earlier, some of the nurses had chosen to continue on instead of disembarking.

"It is sad, but I'm glad I came." Alice linked her arm through Maryanne's and steered her toward the remains of the church in the near distance. "It will help me better understand what George saw and experienced over here."

"Still pining for your sergeant?" Maryanne's tone conveyed her light teasing. "I would have thought you'd find someone closer at hand to give your heart to." She tossed a meaningful look behind them to where the surgeon, Dr. Hamilton, walked with the other three nurses.

Alice wasn't blind to the doctor's interest in her. They'd become friends during their time at the hospital in Germany the last five months, but her feelings for Dr. Hamilton hadn't progressed further than friendship. She still couldn't rid her thoughts or her heart of Sergeant George Dennis. The man she'd met, disliked, and then fallen in love with during her time at St. Vincent's.

"I don't know if he's still *my* sergeant." She hadn't heard from George in months, though she planned to send a letter to his home in Wisconsin to tell him of her departure plans once she knew the details. "But I can't stop hoping."

"You could still be a nurse if you married Dr. Hamilton. Work side by side in his hometown hospital."

Nursing was something Alice loved more than anything else, and Maryanne knew it. But she wouldn't be trapped into discussing a possible future with the doctor. Not yet, and maybe not ever.

"Maryanne," Alice warned in a fierce whisper, turning to make sure Dr. Hamilton wasn't within hearing distance. "He hasn't even broached the subject of courtship or marriage with me."

Maryanne shrugged, but a smile played about her lips. "Not yet, but we'll see."

"I'm going to look inside the church. Do you want to come?"

When her friend declined, Alice went on alone, grateful for a few minutes to herself. Two of the church walls still stood, despite the shell holes that pockmarked the stone. Alice picked her way through the debris. There were no pews and no glass in the remaining window casings, but the building still held an air of reverence.

Alice took a seat on a large stone and shut her eyes. Ignoring the murmur of voices outside, she could imagine herself back at St. Vincent's in the old stone church behind the

hospital, where she'd last spoken with George. She could almost conjure up the scratch of his wool uniform beneath her cheek and the warmth of his large hand as he tenderly gripped her fingers. He'd come back to the hospital for the wedding of two of their dearest friends, and Alice had relished the unexpected time together, however brief, before they had to say goodbye again.

"I'd like to talk to you about somethin'," George had said, his deep voice uncharacteristically somber.

"Yes?" Alice lifted her head to look into his brown eyes and handsome face. A face etched with strength, humor, and kindness. She always felt small, yet, protected in his presence, her petite frame dwarfed by his tall, muscular one.

George brought her hand to his mouth and kissed her knuckles, sending shivers of delight tripping up Alice's arm. "You know I care for you, don't you, Red?" She smiled at the nickname, referencing her red hair, that he used whenever they were alone.

Before she could answer in the affirmative, George plunged on. "I had every intention of askin' you to be my girl today. But the more I've been thinkin' on it, the more I realize we oughta wait."

"Until when?" An engagement would have to be kept secret, since those in the Army Nurse Corps weren't allowed to marry, and Alice wasn't comfortable with that. But she didn't want George leaving without some sort of promise between them.

"I think we need to wait until this war is over, and we're both home." He gave her hand a gentle squeeze. "I want this chapter of our lives behind us, so we can start a brand new one, together." His gaze rose to something above her head, and the lines around his mouth tightened. "We don't know what the next few months or years might bring before this thing is over and done for good."

Alice hadn't recognized it at the time, but George had been hinting at the reality that he might not live to see the end of the war. Now sitting in the half-demolished church, she could understand why he'd been unable to make her a definitive promise that day—it was a miracle any of the soldiers had survived the fighting to return home.

“What I will ask you, though,” George said, tracing her face with his thumb, “is to remember me. To give our future a good amount of thought and prayer. And I'll do the same.”

Tears filled Alice's eyes, as much at his words as the faith behind them, the faith he'd recently found again. And she loved him all the more for it. “I can do that.”

“Then there's just one more thing I need you need to remember.”

“What's that?” Alice's heart beat faster with expectation as George placed his hand against the nape of her neck and drew her close.

“I'll love you, forever, Red,” he murmured, his mouth a mere inch from her own. “And that's the truth.”

“Alice?” Maryanne called, her voice drifting through the crumbled walls of the church. “We're going to see if we can find something to eat before we board the next train.”

Alice jerked upright, her recollections scattering like a flock of startled birds. “I'm coming.” She stood and glanced around the church one last time.

An entire lifetime worth of memories had been made during her time as a nurse on this continent. Hundreds of painful, gut-wrenching memories. And hundreds of satisfying, happy ones, too. She'd come overseas a bit naïve but determined to do good for those under her care. And while she'd done that, she couldn't help thinking she was the one who'd grown and changed and mended the most.

She wasn't the same girl who'd left Idaho all those months ago. She'd learned what it meant to work harder than she ever thought she could, what it meant to watch good people suffer or die, what it meant to rely on her faith in moments of doubt and despair.

And what it meant to love.

Leaving the church, she walked with purpose toward the waiting group. Her sacrifice would always pale in comparison with those who, like George, had fought in the war, but she liked to think she'd given a good portion of her own blood, sweat, and tears for her country. And now it was time to go home. To find her future. A future she hoped included a certain sergeant.



### *Wisconsin*

George Dennis, former sergeant in the American Expeditionary Forces, shoved the dairy cow back into place with his broad shoulder. "You ornery oaf," he growled as he resumed the milking. "Would've thought you'd gained some good humor in my absence."

Raindrops plunked against the ground outside the open barn doors, mixing with the sound of the milk as it squirted into the pail. The smell of cows, manure, and wet earth filled his nostrils.

He'd been surprised, on his return home, to find the old cow still alive. A number of the young men in their small town hadn't returned from the trenches in France as George had. And so the fact that this grumpy bovine still clung to life struck him as ironic.

In this and other things, life on his family's dairy farm hadn't changed much during the time he'd been away fighting. The two-story farm house and red barn looked nearly the same, if



not a couple of years more weathered. His mother's apple pie tasted as delicious as ever. And he helped his father milk the cows every morning and night, same as he had before the war.

But some things weren't the same.

As if to prove his point, a loud clap of thunder rocked the barn and sent George to his knees in the dirt. He covered his head with his hands, his heart beating a frantic rhythm. The noise in his ears transformed into the explosion of shellfire and the screams of the wounded and dying. His thoughts coalesced to a single point of origin—protect himself and the men under his command.

“George?”

The voice sounded like his good friend Hank. But Hank had been killed at Argonne. A bullet to the head.

“I'm sorry, Hank,” George murmured, rocking forward and back as the grief sliced anew. “I didn't see the machine gun.”

“George?” A solid hand, unlike the ghosts in his head, settled on George's shoulder.

“You all right, son?”

The memories receded slowly, until the spilled milk dampening his pant legs and the dripping rain registered in his mind.

Embarrassment heated his neck. Most times the awful remembering came only at night, in dreams that felt so real George could smell the smoke and blood of the battlefield and feel the weight of his gun in his hands. He didn't like the idea of his father witnessing his private struggle to return to normal life after what George had seen and done.

“I'm fine.” George righted the upset bucket and waved away the hand his father offered to help him stand. “Sorry about the milk,” he said, rising to his feet.

“There’s no shame in it,” Joseph Dennis said as if reading his son’s earlier thoughts. He picked up the now empty bucket and situated it beneath the next cow. “My father fought his own demons for years.”

George’s grandfather had served in the War Between the States. And though he’d only known him as a child, George had always felt a special bond between them. “But Grandpa always had a smile,” he countered. George had been told he’d inherited his good-humored nature from his father’s father.

Joseph sat on a stool beside the cow. The hiss of the milk hitting the pail filled the quiet barn. “Not always, son. There were plenty of times he didn’t.”

“What helped?” George grabbed a second bucket, then sat to milk another cow.

“His faith and my mother. But he wasn’t the same when he came home. Everybody said so.” Joseph paused in milking. “I didn’t know any different. But remember this, George. He was a good husband and a good father, despite what he experienced. Maybe because of it, in some ways.”

George didn’t respond as he settled into the rhythm of milking, but his father words seeped into his soul like rain on parched soil. He’d rediscovered his faith in God while recovering from a busted knee at the hospital in France where he’d met Alice Thornton. If nothing else, those were two good things to come out of his service in the war.

Alice had intrigued him on his first day at St. Vincent’s, despite the intense pain coming from his knee. Barely five feet, she still had enough firm kindness and no-nonsense attitude to intimidate even the most obstinate of patients into compliance. But George had never liked being completely compliant, especially when he learned he could easily get her ire up. He loved

watching those green eyes of hers spark with annoyance or veiled interest, and so he'd employed every antic he could think of to get her attention.

He smiled to himself as he thought how finding his faith again had also meant finding himself on Alice's good side for more than a day. Whatever enjoyment he'd found in teasing her, it couldn't compare to the happiness he found at finally getting to know her. To talk with her, to kiss her.

*Wonder what she's doing now.* He hadn't heard from Alice since she'd told him she was transferring to Germany five months ago. Even then, that letter had only reached him right before he was preparing to come home.

Did she still feel the same as she once had for him? George had asked her to seriously consider a future together, but that had been eight months ago. She might have met someone else or changed her mind about marrying a dairy farmer.

All he knew for certain was she still held his heart, wholly and completely, and nearly every night he prayed that, God-willing, Alice thought of him the same way. If she did, he planned to marry her as soon as she came home. They'd been apart long enough. It was time to begin a new life together.

When the cows had all been milked, George followed his father through the drizzle outdoors into the house. The smell of bread made his stomach rumble with hunger. He removed his muddy boots and waited his turn to wash up at the sink.

"You got a letter today, George." Ruth Dennis turned from the stove and removed the envelope from her apron pocket. "All the way from France."

George's pulse kicked faster as he took the letter from her, the need to wash forgotten. "I'm gonna read it now."

He walked to the screened-in porch and took a seat in one of the two rocking chairs. While the handwriting was a bit smudged, George recognized it as Alice's. He tore open the letter and began to read, eager for news.

She talked about her work in the hospital in Germany, caring mostly for influenza patients and assisting a Dr. Hamilton in the surgery ward. A flicker of jealousy flashed through George at the mention of this other man, even though he knew nothing about him. *No gettin' your dander up over nothing*, he told himself. He blew out a steady breath and continued reading.

Towards the end of the letter, Alice detailed her plans for returning to the States and which boat she'd be sailing home on. She would be docking in New York in five days. Which meant she'd likely sent her letter on a ship leaving right before hers.

Five days and she'd be back on American soil. George's heart thumped harder with anticipation. The time and distance that had separated them for so long was nearly at an end.

He read through her plans again, but this time, he was only half paying attention as he began to think up plans of his own. Alice certainly didn't expect him to be in New York waiting—they'd made no definitive promises. But something inside him told him he should be on that dock when her boat arrived. If he wasn't, and she returned home straightaway to Idaho and wrote him from there, he feared he might lose her.

Mind made up, he stood and hurried back into the kitchen. "I'm heading to New York tomorrow."

His parents glanced up from the table where they'd begun eating. "Tomorrow?" Joseph asked.

"New York?" Ruth choked out. "Whatever for?"

“Because Alice will be there in five days, and I’d like to be there when she docks.” He’d told his parents about Alice Thornton and his hopes for bringing her home as his wife someday soon.

George turned a chair around and sat, leaning his arms against the back rest. His earlier hunger had abated in the wake of his new plans. “If I leave tomorrow, I can be there in time.”

“You’ll miss the auction.” Joseph calmly buttered a slice of bread, though a tremor of regret cut through George. He and his father had combined what money they had in hopes of winning the bid on the farm and house that bordered their property. The plan was to combine the land and give George and his future bride a place of their own to live and work.

George fingered the letter still clutched in his hand. Train fare to New York and back would take money away from what they could bid. “I’m sorry, Pop. I don’t want to let you down on this, but . . . I need to go. I’ve got to be there when she steps back onto American soil.”

Ruth reached over and placed her hand over his. “Then that’s what you do.”

He smiled in gratitude at his mother, though he still wanted his father to voice agreement, too. After all his father had done for him, George didn’t want to disappoint him, but he couldn’t let Alice down either. He had to see her right away, before she went home for good.

Joseph set down his bread and draped his arm around his wife’s shoulders. “Your ma’s right. If that what needs doing, you do it.”

George grinned. “Thank you. You’re gonna love her.” He started for the door.

“What about supper?” Ruth asked with a laugh.

“Food can wait. I’ve got packing to do and a girl to meet.”



*Atlantic Ocean*

“What’s lowlier than a private?” an officer asked his companion in an overly loud voice. They both leaned casually against the ship’s railing. Alice rolled her eyes at their show of nonchalance.

The second officer smirked as he eyed her and the other nurses seated on mattresses along the deck. “What?”

“An army nurse.” They both barked with laughter.

Alice glared and folded her arms against the irritation rising inside her. As if things weren’t going badly on this trip already . . . The nurses had been assigned cramped rooms on the lower passenger decks for the voyage across the ocean, while officers, like these two, enjoyed spacious accommodations on the higher decks.

After a week of confinement in the tiny room due to bad weather, Alice had led the others in a revolt. They’d commandeered two upper decks for their berths. But that had only infused the spoiled officers with greater mirth rather than greater compassion. It seemed at every opportunity they liked to poke fun at the nurses.

“Maryanne, who screams louder than a girl on the operating table?” Alice kept her gaze locked on the first officer’s.

Maryanne, seated beside her, chuckled. “Who?”

“Any man over the rank of first sergeant.” She smiled demurely at the two soldiers who scowled back before walking away. “Hopefully that quiets them down for a day or two.”

Dr. Hamilton approached them. “Pay them no mind, Nurse Thornton,” he said, frowning at the two officers. “If they’d been at our hospital in Germany, they would have gladly given up

their rooms to our nurses. While I don't begrudge them being healthy and whole, I can't help but wish they'd had the chance to experience the exceptional care you nurses provide."

Alice smiled. "Thank you." The compliment pleased her, especially coming from such a renowned surgeon.

Instead of moving on, the doctor pushed his hands into his pockets and shifted his weight, as if suddenly nervous. "I wondered if you might care to walk with me around the top deck, Nurse Thornton."

"Oh." A seed of unease sprouted inside her at the request, but she had nothing else to do. Besides, she reasoned, it was just a walk. "That would be nice." She put on her hat, then climbed to her feet, but not before catching the grin Maryanne threw her way. Ignoring her friend, Alice smiled at the doctor and led the way to the stairs.

A mild, salt-tainted breeze blew across the ship's top deck. After more than a week on the water, the gentle rolling of the vessel no longer bothered Alice.

"It's a beautiful day," she remarked as she and Dr. Hamilton fell into step beside each other.

"It is. Though if you'd permit me to say, you are far more beautiful."

Alice's cheeks warmed. She appreciated the compliment, but she couldn't help wishing it were George walking beside her, telling her how pretty he thought her. "Thank you," she managed to say in a friendly tone.

The doctor tucked his hands behind his back. "Have you enjoyed your time nursing overseas?"

"Very much." Alice gazed out at the sea on her right. "I'll always be grateful to have served where I did, though I won't miss the daily witness to what war can do."

“Well put,” Dr. Hamilton said, nodding. “I’m looking forward to returning to the hospital in my hometown, but I can’t say I won’t miss the work I did France or Germany.” He threw her a probing look. “Or the people I worked with.”

Alice hurried to change the subject. Their walk was proving far less harmless than she’d hoped. “I do envy your chance to continue working in a hospital.”

The doctor faced forward again. “Isn’t that what you’ll do?”

Regret tugged at Alice’s heart. “I don’t know.”

If she and George were still a possibility, and she very much hoped they were, then she would give up nursing. It would be a sacrifice, but she would do it to be with him. Perhaps she could even do something similar in Wisconsin, though she knew it wouldn’t be quite the same as working in a busy hospital ward or assisting with surgeries.

When they reached the starboard bow, Dr. Hamilton stopped. Alice did the same, wrapping her hands around the railing.

“I’m saddened to hear you might not continue using your exceptional skills as a nurse.” He placed his hand over Alice’s, though he didn’t look her way. Her earlier discomfort returned, stronger and more panicked, but she couldn’t pull away without offending him. “I would like you to keep nursing, Alice.” It was the first time he’d used her given name. “But I’d like you to do so as more than an assistant. I would like to court you properly, with the hope you’ll consent to be my wife one day soon.”

Alice’s face flushed anew, especially when he turned toward her, his gaze expectant. “Dr. Hamilton . . .”

“Please.” He lifted her hand from the railing and rubbed his thumb over her fingers. “Call me Arthur.”



“Arthur,” she tried again. The name felt strange on her tongue. She’d only ever known him as Dr. Hamilton. “I’m flattered, truly.”

The lines of his brow deepened. “However?” he prompted.

“I . . .” Alice glanced down at their hands, waiting for the wonderful intensity of feeling that had accompanied each touch from George. But she felt nothing.

*Foolish heart*, she chided. George might not be waiting for her, and here was Arthur offering her a chance to continue doing what she loved most. And yet, it wouldn’t be with the man she loved most.

“Is there someone else?”

Alice looked out over the blue-green waves of the sea, wishing she could see past the hundreds of miles now separating her and George. “There was . . . once.” She breathed out a sigh. “There may still be.”

The doctor nodded. “I understand. Might I still have a chance, though?”

She didn’t want to give him false hope, but she also hadn’t received a sure answer yet to her prayers about her and George. “May I have some time to think about it?”

His expression brightened. “Yes, of course.”

She gently extracted her hand from his grip, though she tempered the action with a smile. “You should have my answer soon.” At least she hoped so. They would be back in America in a few more days, and more than anything, she wanted to face her future with confidence, knowing exactly what God wanted her to do.



*New York City*

“Do you have a telegram for George Dennis?” George asked the man at the telegraph office. His father had promised to send one after the auction ended, and he wanted to know the results—good or bad—before he saw Alice.

“One moment.”

George turned toward the open door to survey the crowds of people moving through the train station beyond the office, his foot tapping out a steady rhythm. Men in uniform hugged their crying sweethearts, while parents toted luggage and children across the vast space.

“Here you are.” The man handed a slip of paper to George.

George thanked him and stepped back into the chaos of the station. Finding a vacant corner, he quickly read the telegram.

GOOD NEWS. STOP. WON THE BID. STOP. FARM AND HOUSE WAITING FOR YOU. STOP.

They’d won, even with less money. George whooped with momentary excitement, drawing attention from those walking close to him. He paid them no mind as pocketed the telegram. Now he and Alice would have their own place. If she agreed to marry him, and if he reached her boat in time. Uncertainty slowly began eating away at his enthusiasm as he left the station.

The feeling intensified as George surveyed the towering buildings and busy city streets. Though he’d seen them on his return trip home, they still made him feel vulnerable and

unprotected. The cacophony of sound rolled over him like a barrage and he cringed, hunching his shoulders against the noise. His breathing became quicker, more labored.

Leaning against a nearby wall, George offered a quick prayer for help. Then gritting his teeth, he hiked his bag higher on his shoulder and tried to remember the way to the docks.

A glance at his wristwatch had George walking faster—and gave him something to focus on besides the chaos around him. He didn't want to miss Alice's boat. But he soon realized he had no idea where to go from here. He kept moving down the street at a steady clip before he finally stopped, in desperation, to ask directions from a man climbing out of a shiny black automobile.

Armed with instructions, George finally reached the docks. Things were as frenzied there as he remembered. Everywhere he looked he saw passengers coming and going, mounds of luggage and cargo idling in the sun, sailors moving about the boats, and stevedores shouting orders. The smell of ocean and fish filled his nose as he pushed through the throngs in search of Alice's ship. He passed several ocean liners, but none were the one he sought.

He pulled out Alice's letter and checked the name again. Had he missed it? Dread tightened his stomach. If he didn't find her, should he head to Idaho next? He had the address of her family's farm, but he'd wanted their reunion to take place here and now. He hated the thought of waiting even one more day to see her, and hopefully, make her his wife.

George kept walking along the dock, spurred onward by the feeling of urgency that had only grown stronger on his journey across the country. At last he spied the name he'd been looking for on the hull of a massive ship. The gangplank had already been dropped and a group of officers were hurrying down it.

“Don’t let me miss seeing her, Lord,” he murmured as he put her letter back inside his bag. Not when he was this close.

Moving to the side of the gangplank, George lowered his bag to the ground and took a couple of deep breaths as he prepared to wait as long as needed to see Alice again.



Alice pushed her way through the throng of passengers lining the railing on the top deck, Maryanne right behind her. “There it is,” Alice cried with excitement. The Statue of Liberty loomed in the distance.

“I can’t believe we’re almost home.” Maryanne gripped her arm, laughing.

Alice kept her gaze trained on the regal statue, a thrill shooting through her at the sight, just as it had on her departure from this same shore. Only this time, the feeling of pride and gratitude were accompanied by the prick of tears. Tears of happiness but also sorrow. Her time in the Army Nurse Corps was almost over.

She eyed the New York skyline ahead, urging the ship to move faster. Home had never sounded so wonderful, especially now that she had a portion of her answer regarding the future. The rest, she trusted, would come.

“Once we finish at the Demobilization Station, I’m going to find me the biggest slice of pie to eat that you’ve ever seen,” Maryanne said with a smile. “What do you want to do?”

Alice glanced behind her to where she’d last seen Dr. Hamilton—*Arthur*—speaking with another gentleman. “First, I need to give my answer to the doctor.”

Maryanne followed her gaze. “Have you decided what you’re going to do?”

“Yes.” Alice blew out a sigh.

Her answer brought an instant frown to her friend’s face. “That’s doesn’t sound like a ‘yes, I want to marry him.’”

“I don’t know all the reasons, Maryanne, but I’m not supposed to marry him, even for the chance to keep nursing.” She glanced down at the waves stirred up in the ship’s wake. “I want to marry for love—whether that’s with George or not. And I don’t love Arthur.”

“Fair enough.” Maryanne rested her hand on Alice’s arm. “I just want to see you happy.”

“Thanks,” Alice said, smiling. She had made so many good friends during her time overseas, and she would miss each one of them. She’d even miss Maryanne’s misguided matchmaking.

After an agonizing wait, the ship finally reached the docks and the gangplank was lowered. Alice led Maryanne to join the long line of people disembarking. When they at last reached the gangplank, Alice clutched the rail as she walked down the wooden footbridge. Her legs still felt as if they were walking about a moving ship.

Their progress was halted moments later as a crowd began forming at the end of the gangplank. Alice eyed the throng of people with growing impatience—she wanted room to move and breathe again. As her gaze swept the unfamiliar faces of those waiting on the docks, she found herself watching a man standing off to one side, his head lowered. Something about the set of his broad shoulders struck her as familiar. Holding her breath, Alice waited until he lifted his head.

George!

When his brown eyes caught and held hers, she needed no further answer about her future. There it was, smiling up at her with all the tenderness and hope she’d longed for.

“We need to get off this ship—now.” Alice looped her arm through Maryanne’s. “Excuse me,” she called out in her firmest nurse’s tone. “We’d like to get through.”

Several long minutes later, after pushing through the crowd and dragging Maryanne along with her, Alice emerged onto the docks. But she couldn’t see George in the press of people.

“George?” she called out, rushing forward.

Maryanne turned and gaped at her. “He’s here? He came?”

“Yes, but I have to find him.” Alice didn’t slow her pace. “George?”

“Red?”

The name washed over Alice with all the sweetness of a summer rain. The couple in front of her stepped aside and there he was, a lopsided grin on his face.

Dropping her bag, Alice crossed the space to him in two quick strides, not caring who witnessed her eagerness. George caught her around the waist and hoisted her in the air as she hugged him tight. Her heart raced at the familiarity of his strong arms encircling her, filling her with anticipated bliss in a way Arthur’s touch never had.

“What are you doing here?” she asked when he set her on her feet. She reached up to touch his face, reassuring herself this wasn’t a dream.

George laughed. The deep, joyous sound flooded her with warmth. “I got this strange hankering a couple of days ago to see New York again.”

Alice linked her fingers with his, her stomach fluttering with expectation. “But you’re at the docks, instead of in the city,” she teased.

“I know.” He lifted his powerful shoulders in a casual shrug. “I thought I’d see what washed up on shore today.” His eyes glint with mischief before softening with hope in a way that made her pulse sprint.

“And did you find what you were hoping for?”

He brought her hand to his mouth and placed a kiss against her fingertips. A tremor of delight filled Alice’s middle. “I think so . . . if she’ll still have me.”

Before Alice could reply, a female voice cut through the air. “Maryanne? Alice? Are you coming with us?”

Alice glanced past George to see Dr. Hamilton and a small group of nurses and soldiers watching her.

“I’ll tell them you’ll meet up with us later.” Maryanne started to walk away.

“No, wait.” She needed to talk to Dr. Hamilton now, instead of stringing him along. “I’ll be right back,” she told George.

He looked from her to the doctor and back, his earlier smile fading. “All right.”

Alice approached the group, Maryanne beside her. “May I have word, Dr. Hamilton?” She indicated a spot free of people beside a barrel.

He fingered the brim of his hat and followed her away from the others. “Is that the man you were referring to when we spoke the other day?” He eyed George with a grim expression.

“Yes.” Alice followed his gaze to George. A smile lifted her mouth at the sight of his familiar tall frame before she focused on the doctor again. “I appreciate your proposal . . . Arthur. Very much. But I’m afraid I can’t marry you. You need someone who will love you as much as she loves working with you.”

“But that’s not you,” he finished, frowning.

Alice gave his arm a kind squeeze. “And that’s not me.”

He pushed out a sigh and put his hat on. “Then I suppose,” he cleared his throat, “I wish you all the best, Alice.”

“You, too.”

She watched him join the others, then she waved to Maryanne, calling out, “I’ll find you later.”

When the group headed down the docks, Alice hurried back to George. She felt lighter, and more hopeful, than she had in weeks.

“Now, what would you like to do?” She clasped George’s hand, but instead of smiling, he stiffened.

“Is there someone else, Alice?” His gaze narrowed and moved to follow the doctor. “If so, just tell me now. I’ll be happy for you, but I ought to go . . .”

Alice went up on tiptoe to press her finger to his lips, silencing his unfounded protest. “There has never been anyone but you.” She lowered herself back to her feet. “The doctor fancied himself in love with me, but I didn’t feel the same. I gave my heart to you that day at St. Vincent’s, George.” For the second time that day, tears filled her eyes. “And you still have it.”

“You mean that?” A slow smile began to dispel his somber expression.

She gave an emphatic nod. “Yes.”

“Think you’d mind stopping off in Wisconsin instead of Idaho? I’ve got my own farm and house now.”

“George, that’s wonderful.” She took hold of his hand. “Even if it’s a tent in the Tetons, if it’s with you, I want to be there, too.”



Grinning, George drew her close. “Then you and I better get married, Red. Today.” He took her face between his hands. “Our families may not be there, but I think they’ll understand. I can’t wait another day to have you in my life forever.”

He didn’t wait for her response to his impassioned speech. Instead he leaned down and kissed her, stealing Alice’s breath and any coherent thought. Her pulse thrummed with electricity at the firm press of his mouth against hers. She rose to the balls of her feet and wound her arms around his neck as she deepened their kiss. Joy, unlike any she’d experienced before, filled her from head to toe. They’d made it back to each other, just as they’d hoped and prayed to do all those months ago.

When he eased back some minutes later, George smiled fully at her, then shouldered her bag along with his own. “Marry me, Red.”

“Is that an order?” she countered, though there was nothing she would rather do.

“Absolutely,” he said, sweeping her off her feet to carry her in his arms.

Alice gave him a mock salute. “Then by all means, lead the way, Sergeant.”

“Never say ‘no’ to a nurse,” he called out to the few passersby who were openly staring at them. “Especially this one.”

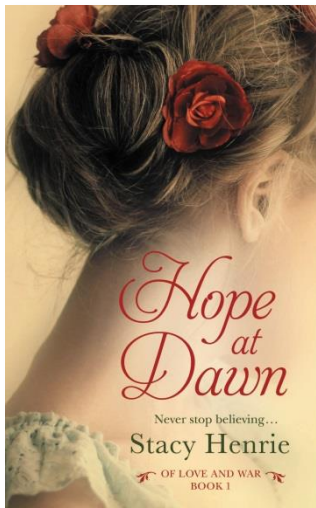
Laughing, Alice rested her cheek against his. “I love you, George Dennis. And I always will.”

He stopped to place a quick kiss on her lips before carrying her down the docks. “So will I, Red. So will I.”

THE END

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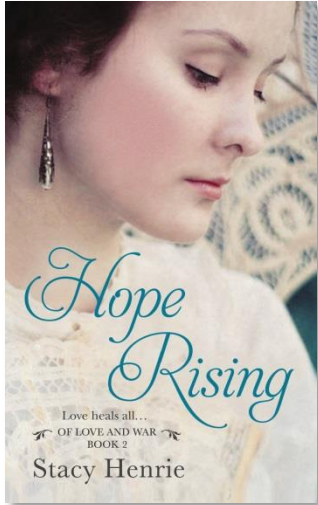
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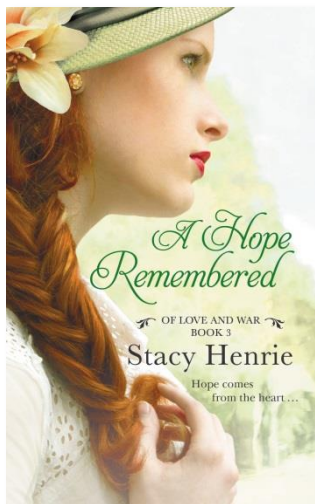
In France at the height of World War I, American nurse Evelyn Gray is no stranger to suffering. She's helped save the life of many a soldier, but when she learns her betrothed has been killed, her own heart may be broken beyond repair. Summoning all her strength, Evelyn is determined to carry on—not just for herself and her country, but for her unborn child.

Corporal Joel Campbell dreams of the day the war is over and he can return home and start a family. When a brutal battle injury puts that hope in jeopardy, Joel is lost to despair . . . until he meets Evelyn. Beautiful, compassionate, and in need of help, she makes an unconventional proposal that could save their lives—or ruin them irrevocably. Now, amidst the terror and turmoil of the Western Front, these two lost souls will have to put their faith in love to find the miracle they've been looking for.

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## **A HOPE REMEMBERED (Of Love and War, Book 3)**

AS THE WAR ENDS, LOVE BEGINS ...

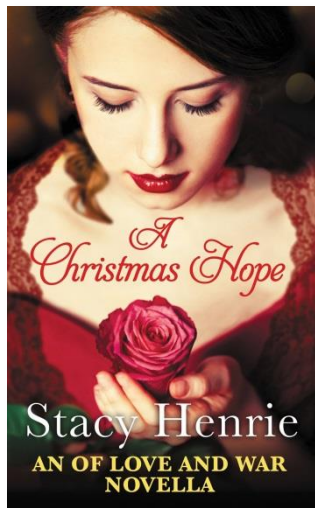
Nora Lewis just wants an escape after losing her fiancé in the Great War. When she inherits property in England, she boldly packs up and leaves America for a fresh start. But, if not for her dashing new neighbor, Colin Ashby, she'd be lost. Even as their friendship deepens, Nora knows a British aristocrat would never be free to love an American orphan, no matter how much the war has changed the world ...

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Saving lives was all Dale Emerson ever wanted to do . . . until a fateful day in France shattered his career as a surgeon. He lost everything that mattered, and the last thing he wants to do is resign himself to a life without medicine working at his uncle's bank. Then he meets Maria, a compassionate woman who can see past his scars to the man he once was-and the man he could be again. With Christmas right around the corner, these two wounded hearts may find that hope and a little holiday cheer are just the ticket to letting go of regrets-and embracing a future full of love and possibility.

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