



The War Of The Remingtons

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by

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Chapter One

Amelia sat by the fire knitting. Her gaze was on the man sitting nearby, as he read a history of the Revolutionary War while jawing on what was left of his cigar. Her attention to Samuel Remington was rich with unspoken possibilities. He was a man of rugged character and looks, often forbiddingly stern and formal, though his heart was generous and his nature passionate. Though his brown hair had grayed, his face was yet vigorous and youthful, his eyes intense and his speech impeccable. His compact, stocky build distinguished him as a rooted and powerful man, that matched the rough 1890's Wyoming in which he lived. His allure would be his command, appealing only to women of a submissive nature who would not think of challenging his authority. Amelia found herself intrigued by him, though just as frightened as she was curious.

"You hear something?" Samuel's ears perked and he looked up from his reading to pay attention to the unusual sound outside the lodge's thick log walls.

"Just the wind," she answered.

"Humph. You're likely right." He returned to his book.

She smiled kindly and resumed her knitting. The lovely Amelia had been blessed with fine, soft features: bright eyes, long lashes, a pretty winsome mouth and pale skin, though her cheeks glowed a natural rosy pink. The ash blonde hair piled atop her head was, by this time in the evening, loose enough to look alluringly sexual, though she would be too innocent to realize that fact, and her companion would be too oblivious to any such feelings he might harbor for his housekeeper. They spent their evening in a comfortable silence, punctuated only by an occasional comment about the weather and the rising gale blowing outside. The two seemed lost inside the grandeur of Great Bear Lodge, the shadows looming around them, only dispelled by the light of the roaring blaze in the massive stone fireplace. Some odd crawling feeling created a grand

shiver through Amelia's entire frame just before Samuel spoke again—as if she was having a premonition.

"Did you hear that?" he asked.

She heard it now, too—the sound of a shouting voice. "Christian, perhaps?" she wondered aloud. He could be the source of her prickly premonitions.

"Damn! If he's back... !" Samuel thundered as he rose to his feet.

Suddenly, there was a pounding on the huge oak door.

Samuel strode toward the entrance of his lodge with Amelia on his heels. An enormous blast of cold air greeted them along with Christian Remington's anxious face. In his arms he held the body of a young woman.

"What is this!" his fathered demanded.

"I'm not sure, sir," he answered as he carried the limp body inside to Samuel's sofa and laid her gently against the soft leather.

"Amelia, some blankets and tea," Samuel shouted. Amelia was already on her way. "One of your harlots, I suppose," he leered down at the groaning woman, her dark hair flipping frantically side to side, wet, clinging to her neck and clothes. She wore britches, boots and a leather shirt, but was distinctly feminine despite the masculine attire. There was a necklace of beads about her neck, a talisman of Indian origin.

"No, she's not a whore," Christian barked. He was on his knees beside her, gently stroking her hair. "I think this is Charlotte Desmond."

"Good God! Would that it was!" Samuel declared. "How did you find her?"

"About ten miles from here, I stumbled on her huddled near some rocks. By the time I found her, she was delirious; fever I think."

"You'll ride for the doctor, then."

"Someone else will ride for the doctor," Christian answered. "I found her; I'll take care of her."

"I have no one to go out in this storm."

"She'll be fine without a doctor." The boy was sure of himself laying a tender hand on her cheek. He looked up, seeing both his father and Amelia hovering over them.

"Tea, Christian." Amelia handed him the cup, then covered the shivering woman with two wool blankets.

"Put a little brandy in that," Samuel decided, finding his decanter and pouring a hefty shot into the mug. "I think she needs a doctor, son."

"Perhaps in the morning," Christian replied. He was too busy nursing the young woman to care about his father's demands. Of course, it was expected that they'd disagree; they did on everything else in their lives. In his twenty-five years, the impudent and reckless son of Samuel Remington could be counted on to rebel against his father on every issue. He had his own passions and his own life. Still, he continued to return home every few months as though beyond their differences there was some genuine love between them.

Amelia knelt at the girl's head to assist the younger Remington with the tea. Her soft hand caressed the girl's face to calm her, while Christian tipped the cup to her lips. Just as his spirit was as indomitable as his father's, they shared the same quality of compassion.

"You're cold yourself, Christian," Amelia said, feeling his shivering hands.

"I'll warm." His gaze turned to her, and momentarily he flashed his charming grin. The blue of his eyes was enough by itself to woo her. She shook with the remembrance of old passions, seeing the sensuousness she'd seen before.

"What has it been, a year now?" Samuel speculated, as he moved to the fireplace for another matchstick. "They believed she was taken by Indians. It's obvious now, seeing the way she's dressed. Poor Charles. He would be relieved to know his daughter is alive. I wonder if the Indians knew he'd died last month?" The elder Remington looked wistfully

toward the girl. "Certainly she has relations in the East who will be happy to note her survival. I'll have to write the Army and find out about Colonel Desmond's kin." He lit his cigar again, and puffed it into a billowing cloud of fragrant smoke, then stood before the fire. The two at the couch attending the once captured daughter of a US Army Colonel seemed to have the present matter in hand. Clearly, they were lost in their own world without him. The fact was painfully reminiscent of times past, at least those times he remembered between his son and the lovely Miss Burke.

"Will Christian be here for dinner?" Amelia asked Samuel, as she was about to set the table.

"I believe he will, but then we never know about my son, do we? And the girl ..."

"Lottie? She's well enough to come down and join us. I'm so glad her illness was brief."

"Yes, we can all be thankful. Three days has hardly been anything at all." He smiled pleased. "Do see that she has something decent to wear."

"I've already done so, but I'd better check on her. She's not used to social graces. Strange, how just a year in such savage circumstances could change a person so much."

"I understand she was a bit of a fractious brat before she was kidnapped—probably the reason it happened in the first place."

"I'm afraid she's been resisting my ideas for her clothes; perhaps if she had her own...."

"Ah!" His face brightened. "I'm sure you're right. We'll see about a trip into Cheyenne next week."

"Have you written the Army about her parents?"

"Actually, no. I was hoping to have an interview with her personally; see if she could cast some light on her relations, an aunt, uncle, grandparent. The Army moves at an incredibly slow pace. I'm sure I could speed up the process if

I could write to her family directly. I imagine she'd rather be with her kin than remain in our wild lands."

She nodded. "I'll go see how she's doing."

Ten minutes later Amelia returned to the living room wild-eyed and distraught.

"Samuel, please," there was a pleading look in her cottony blue eyes.

"My dear, what's the matter?"

"Miss Charlotte," she said. Her face was nearly white. She slumped into her chair. "She's refusing to dress for dinner."

"Refusing?"

"Yes. Seems there is no debate in her mind over her attire. The leather britches and shirt are what she plans to wear."

"That's completely unsuitable," he lashed out indignantly. "Go persuade her otherwise."

"I've tried, sir. Adamantly. Reports of her obstinate character have not been exaggerated."

"It is your duty, Amelia, to take care of such things," he said firmly. "Try again."

"Samuel ..." She sighed wearily and reluctantly rose from her seat, making her way up the staircase one more time.

Moments later, Samuel heard a painful shriek, the sound of something crashing to the floor, then a door slamming overhead. In seconds his housekeeper was rapidly taking the stairs, approaching her employer in a panic while trying to regain some measure of composure.

"She is not persuaded, sir."

"No?"

"Absolutely not! Your mother's floral vase is now in a thousand pieces!" Amelia had never raised her voice to the man in her three years with him, though she was tempted now.

"Perhaps she needs a manly approach?" he suggested kindly.

“A good kick in the pants,” Amelia added, she was still out of breath. “I’ll see to dinner.” She made a hasty exit, all too glad to turn over the project of Lottie Desmond’s attire to Samuel.

The master of Great Bear Lodge was amused. The flustered Amelia looked prettier than ever, all winded and mussed. The two women must have had quite a tangle to have the normally serene Miss Burke this undone. While her cheeks had been so pale the first time—as though she was bewildered by their houseguest—on her second return from the upstairs battleground, those same cheeks were now flushed red from whatever transpired between the two. As he expected, the prim young woman was lady enough not to tell him the nature of their quarrel, but he suspected the brat had given her quite a mouthful. Lottie Desmond, in just three days, had proved to be lacking the cultural refinement typical of young women of her social status. As Amelia had said, her one year in captivity had obviously undone any manners she’d been taught.

Mounting the stairs, Samuel was reminded of his own daughter, Johanna, in her wilder days. He’d tussled with her several times in her teens when she seemed more interested in riding the range than in becoming a refined young lady. More than once, he’d taken his daughter over his knee, stripped her of her bitches and bloomers and given her bare derriere a sound paddling. There had even been a couple of trips to the woodshed when she was particularly irascible. Johanna had a streak as stubborn as her brother’s, and it seemed that the only solution to her unacceptable behavior was a sizzling strap laid on her ass until the two cheeks were crimson from the blaze of it. For both his children the treatment was the only answer he found that worked to bring peace back into his world. At least until Johanna turned seventeen. He’d promptly put her on the train for Boston where he enrolled her in a ladies’ finishing school. His own sister, Hannah, confirmed that the

change in her niece's behavior was remarkable. "It's the environment you raised her in, without a woman, in those forbidding wilds ..." Samuel chuckled. Hannah could go on insufferably about the mistakes he'd made raising his children after Leonora died.

Perhaps now he had another hellion to wrestle. He was hardly interested in the battle, but if it was necessary ...

A knock on Lottie's door yielded no reply.

"Miss Desmond," he spoke directly. "This is Samuel Remington. I shall come in whether you invite me or not."

Still, no reply.

Turning the knob, he was almost surprised that she hadn't locked him out.

Inside the bedroom, he found Lottie sitting in the window seat, fully dressed in the leather garments she wore the night Christian rescued her from the storm. Tucking her knees into her chest, she hugged them as she stared out the window and didn't look up.

"Miss Desmond, perhaps I should have made myself clear to you before now, but I didn't want to interfere with your recuperation." He remained cool and formal, but kind. "We are so glad that you have recovered from your malady. And, I am quite prepared to extend the warmth of my home until we can contact your family and have you returned to them. I'm sure it's quite a shock being thrust back into your own world so suddenly, and we'll do everything we can to make this arrangement an agreeable one. However, there are some rules that must be followed." Lottie showed no sign of hearing a word, and Samuel's delivery became less kind and more severe. "Miss Burke tells me you refused to wear the dress she offered you." He spotted the simple burgundy muslin lying in a heap on the floor. Nearby, the broken vase. Lottie continued to stare disinterestedly out the window. "Miss Desmond, I expect your answer now." His voice was laced with indignation. Samuel waited for some moments, and still no response. "Look at me, young lady," he barked.

He watched her twitch, some sign of giving in. "Look at me!"

This brat was as stubborn as his own children and he knew that only patience and steady determination would work. Finally turning her head, Samuel had his first decent glimpse of Charlotte Desmond. A pair of mean, black eyes stared at him from under the curls of her untamed hair. She might be pretty if she'd change the contentious expression, but for the moment she looked disturbingly distraught as though fueled by anger she could barely contain.

"I don't mince words with my own children, nor will I with you. You are coming to down dinner, Miss Desmond, and you will wear that dress if I have to put it on you myself."

"Don't you dare!" she blared, looking as though she was about to attack.

"Go get the dress!"

"No!"

"Now!"

"NO!"

"Perhaps you'd like a trip to the woodshed. Certainly you understand what that means?"

"You bastard!" the young woman barked. A second later, she spit in his face and sat back on the window seat with a devious smirk on her face.

Shocked, but hardly undone, Samuel pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and calmly wiped his face. Then, making up the short distance between them, he hauled her by the arm, and thrust her head and shoulders under his one arm so he could have at her bare behind. Before the girl realized what was happening, he began spanking his hand against her leather trousers. Yet, quickly certain that his message was not getting beyond the leather, he began to tug at the pants.

"You friggin' sonafabitch!" she roared, kicking and wailing as though her ass had just been scaled with boiling water.

She had no idea how hot it would get before the man was through.

With the pants much too big for her, they came down easier than Samuel expected, leaving him the target he required, a naked expanse of female bottom to spank. His palm spread wide and flat across her plump flesh, the extent of his large hand covering almost an entire cheek with one swat. Pelting her with a steadfast rain of swats, the two globes were red within a few seconds time. Lottie was not about to give up her fight. Struggling violently against him, she thrashed her legs about wildly, not caring where they landed.

"You will not kick me, Miss Desmond," he blared, "unless you want my belt instead of my hand."

She didn't hear a word he said, or simply chose to ignore the threat, because just moments later, the toe of her boot caught his shin. Disregarding the pain that shot up his leg, Samuel went for the buckle of his belt, having the wide leather withdrawn from his pant loops and quickly doubled in his fist. Determined that she wouldn't be kicking him again, he dragged her twisting body to a sturdy table in the corner of the room where he pushed her over the edge, and held her squarely in the center of her back. Resuming the punishment, Samuel laid in on the brat's pink behind with a fire of strikes to rival any he'd used on his own children. She cried and flailed frantically, and yet the strapping went on until her wails finally turned into apologetic pleas.

"Stop! Stop, please!" The first was still full of spit and fire. But as Samuel continued without stopping he began to hear the quality of her protest change. "Please, oh, please no more. I'll put on the dress," she finally agreed, "please." She was desperate.

Samuel continued for some seconds more, punctuating his message with some stiff blows to the center of her behind. One smack laid on over the last, they were sure to bite harshly, and would likely produce a rash that might last

several days. It was just as well. He wanted her to remember this day for a long time. Seeing the bright color of her entire ass end, from the top of her cheeks to her upper thighs, he knew she'd be smarting for some time.

"Please, no more," she cried pitifully, and with that last poignant appeal, he finally stopped.

Letting the distressed young woman rise, he moved to scoop the dress from the floor and toss it her way. She was blushing in her state of half undress, a clear clue that this rebellious young woman wasn't half so uncivilized as she made herself out to be. There was still some of the gentle good breeding residing behind her churlish manner. Seeing that her private parts were adequately covered by the dress, he began his lecture.

"While you live in this house, Miss Desmond, you will wear clothes appropriate for a woman of your age. Amelia and I will take you into Cheyenne to find some dresses of your own next week, but until then, you'll have to do with a few of my housekeeper's hand-me-downs. You'll dine with us at our dinner table, morning, noon and for the evening meal, and you'll conduct yourself in a ladylike manner. You'll guard your tongue, and though I don't expect perfection, you'll do your best to recall the life you lived before you were kidnapped and the requirements of a modest young lady. Have I made myself clear?"

"Yes."

"And," he added, eyes still flashing, "you'll address me as 'sir'".

"Yes, sir," she answered immediately.

Samuel nodded.

Lottie Desmond was just a slip of a girl. Nineteen by now, she looked much younger having just been punished. It wiped all the vinegar from her system and returned her to the innocent maid she was—or at least should have been. No one knew what had happened to her in captivity. Her face was deeply tanned, but fresh and vigorous looking, her

widely spaced dark eyes shone with a much more natural and appealing light now that she was free of her angry rage. She had a broad mouth and surely a fine smile, though it wasn't likely he'd see her smiling any time soon. And though her expression spoke of her young age, her body had clearly ripened into womanhood with a generous bosom and shapely hips.

"Dinner is already late. Please be quick about dressing and be downstairs in five minutes."

She nodded, her lip appearing to tremble. Samuel noticed tears in her eyes, and moved by them, he smiled as he had when he first entered the room. She needed someone to love her, and he was only more inspired to find her kin, a subject they would discuss at dinner.

"Ah, you rapturous woman!" Christian scooped Amelia in his arms practically lifting her from the floor with his engaging hug.

"Christian, no! Your father is waiting for his meal, and you're late."

He nuzzled her neck, making for a painfully delightful rush that shot right down to her toes, though most of it settled between her thighs. He had his hand on her ass, liberally fondling it as though it had a right to be there.

"Christian, stop! Your father will be furious."

"But not you," he snickered, backing off. His sunny blonde hair shone in the light of the kitchen fire. He'd pulled his shirt over his head before he assaulted her, and his bare chest gleamed with a layer of sweat against the definition of his muscles. The impulse to run her hands along them made her clench her fists, refusing to give in to the sexual heat he so easily raised in her. Such handsomeness and charm, the laugh, the smile, the swagger and his firm inviting body. No, not again, she swore to herself, even as her eyes couldn't stop looking at the object of her lust.

“Christian, find a clean shirt now,” she scolded him, as she rushed from the kitchen with a platter of meat and potatoes.

“Careful, Ami, swishing your ass for me, I’ll want to grab it!” he called after her.

“Christian, shush,” she shot back, seeing his father enter the dining room.

“My son’s here?” Samuel asked.

“He is,” she answered exasperated. “And Lottie will be joining us?”

“Momentarily.” As serene as ever, Samuel didn’t give one hint of the scuffle he’d just had with the brat—and he wouldn’t. He was of impeccable breeding, one that clearly kept what was meant to be private behind closed doors. That did not dismiss that fact, that anyone inside the lodge or its perimeter knew exactly what had transpired. The girl’s cries, as well as the sound of the belt hitting her bottom, would have been noticed, the meaning unmistakable. Still, no one would mention the incident. It was a testament to Samuel’s confidence that he expected the treatment to do exactly as he planned it would, and Lottie’s behavior would be forever altered by the moment. Of course, he was never so lucky with his own children, but he could always hope that one go round would be enough for this child.

At dinner Samuel sat at the head of the table, Amelia and Lottie on one side, and a jovial Christian on the other. Opening the meal with a blessing, Samuel seemed to be the only one with his head bowed. Amelia tried not to blush seeing Christian’s sly smile and Lottie sat nervously, hands in her lap waiting for a clue to begin her meal. With vegetables, meat and potatoes served, the Remington men and their housekeeper began to eat, and an eager and obviously hungry Lottie dived into her food with hands and fork alike, her untamed relish shocking her dinner companions. Amelia blushed again, Christian held back an

amused chuckle, and the well-composed Samuel simply went on with dinner ignoring the frightful display.

"Amelia, I'd like to see you in the lodge room before you get started cleaning up," he said just before he left the table and retired for his cigar and brandy.

Already clearing dishes, Amelia dropped what she was doing and joined him in the living room.

"So, where's our guest?" Samuel asked when it was clear they were alone.

"She took the back stairs to her room," Amelia said.

"And Christian?"

"He was going to the stables to attend to Sunny. I believe he'll be sleeping there. But he said to tell you he'd be in later to say goodnight."

"Mind yourself with him, Amelia. I often wonder if my son will forever curse me." He looked wistfully into the fire.

"You shouldn't be so hard on him."

"Humph. You of all people should agree with me."

"I agree he is more of a charmer than he should be, and for his own good, women need to be warned. But there is a great deal of good in him. He's been so thoughtful of Lottie, like an older brother."

Samuel had a hard time accepting Amelia's generosity toward Christian. It was far too infinite in his finite world.

"I'd simply like to think he'd settle himself down. But it's obvious that it will be a long time before that happens. Right now, however, we need to put our efforts into solving Miss Desmond's difficulties. While I inquire about her family, it will be your job to give her a few lessons in proper deportment. That scene at dinner tonight will not be repeated."

"Samuel, she's not been in civilized company in over a year. You can't expect her to act with any kind of dignity."

"But I can expect you to school her. You are still a school teacher by profession."

"But she's such an unwilling pupil," Amelia moaned unhappily. She was hardly pleased being reminded of her occupation, one that she had to put aside in the wake of her unfortunate past.

"Ah, I think that reluctance has passed. My little discussion with her made a distinct impression. One I'm sure she'll not forget."

"And if I refuse you about this?" Amelia asked.

Samuel looked at her, eyes narrowing. "Why would you refuse me?"

"I don't feel up to the task."

"Humph. Perhaps you need the remedy she got this afternoon."

"Samuel!"

"At twelve, seventeen or twenty-nine, my dear, a strap on the bottom can work miracles." He spoke so pointedly she was aghast. There were a hundred reasons for declining this impossible duty, but this last statement silenced her.

"If it would help, you have my permission to paddle her with a wooden spoon if necessary."

"I can't see myself doing that."

"Then, you'll have to find some other method of maintaining discipline. But you will take her under your wing and see to it that she remembers herself. Guidance, she needs guidance, and we will not shirk our responsibility to her dead father. I can't imagine returning her to her family while she's still behaving like a destitute ruffian."

Samuel was a master at silencing her objections in most matters, and it was useless of her to quarrel with him when she would eventually give in.