Raid at Mist Haven

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Summary

OQPromptParty Day 5 (Fri) Prompt 198: A Civil War AU. Southern lady, and soon to be wife of one of the greatest plantation owners in the South, Regina is on the way to be married when her train gets stopped by Yankee bandits.

Inspired by North and South

Notes

I've wanted to write this for a very long time and I hope you enjoy!

Follow-up will be there tomorrow.
Chapter 1

Dearest Robin,

It is the pride of my heart to love you and it is the torment of it to love you so much, separated as we now are. So it is with deepest regret that I write this last letter to you before I will forever be bound to another. After you left for London some months ago, I found myself in an impossible situation, which left my hands tied and heart broken. Although Daddy has offered many an apology for breaking the promise he has made to me, he has agreed to Mother's wish for me to marry Mr. Blanchard whom I think you know just too well. Forgive me, my love, as I have not been able to withstand my mother's iron grip on me once again. In order to protect my heart, I must in spite of myself become an inconstant to detach myself from you, for as it now stands I love you more than I ought. All I ask for is your forgiveness. The current situation of the States has left us quite in despair. Mother thinks it best to leave Charlotte and move further south to the safety of Mr. Blanchard's property near Charleston. My mother, Mary Margaret and I will take the train on April 23rd.

Forever yours,

Regina

He crumbles the letter in his hand, the glass of whiskey he's sipped from only seconds ago meeting the nearest wall.

Xxxxx

The train station is too busy for her liking. People are hustling through the crowds, trying to find the right wagon and their seats. Baggage is carried by slaves who have their eyes focused on the ground as to not offend anyone by looking at them. A conductor blows his whistle. Hasty goodbyes are being said between husbands and wives, fathers and daughters. She wishes her father would be here, would accompany them on the journey, but he chose to stay at Royal Hall. Someone has to defend it, he'd said. The steam of the engine floats through the air, making the ceiling of Charlotte railway station almost invisible. Oh how she wishes she could vanish inside the clouds.

"Hurry up, Regina, we are going to miss our train home!" the girl next to her remarks exaggerated. She is rushing up the stairs to the first class wagon without any help, surely looking for the most comfortable window seat for their journey.

It's not home for me, rather a new prison, she thinks but swallows the words down as she can feel her mother's eyes burning into the back of her hat. Regina tries to take a deep breath, to brace herself, but the corset is too tight, leaving her to simply gasp at the pain and discomfort. Perhaps she is lucky enough to choke before they reach their destination.

"It would do you some good to change that ugly frown of yours into a thankful smile once we are on the train," Mother says while ushering her up the stairs. A conductor offers his hand, which Regina takes thankfully.

"You're forcing me to leave my home and marry Mary Margaret's father. Explain to me again why I should smile thankfully," Regina mutters under her breath, regretting it the second her mother grasps her wrist in that painful hold with her fingernails piercing into her smooth skin.

"Mother!" Regina tries to free herself but she has never been able to escape her mother's iron fist.
"Stop it, you're hurting me."

Cora doesn't let go. Instead, she pulls her daughter so close the tips of their noses are almost touching. Her gaze is as cold as Regina has ever seen it and the temperature in the railway station drops several degrees. "You stupid, stupid girl. I've always regretted your father being too soft with you whenever it came to giving you your will. You're nothing but a foolish, lightheaded doll without manners and it is time for someone to show you where your place is. I am happy to know Leopold will do just that."

Cora lets go, her smile and satisfaction at having the last word evident. Regina doesn't dare to add one more word, knowing everything she says will only make it worse anyway. They enter the cabin of the first class, Mary Margaret already waiting impatiently at the nearest window seat, waving them over when she spies her future step mother and grandmother. Though, to be honest, the girl has been forbidden to call her any version of the name.

Regina swallows and sits down, grabbing the nearest newspaper to read the latest news on the troop movements along the border of the Confederate States, but before she has finished reading the headline, the newspaper is ripped away by her mother. "Stop this. You know I don't like it when you do that."

"What? Educating myself?" Regina mumbles and is met with a glare. Daddy has always let her read whatever she wanted, especially the news. While his business acquaintances belittled him behind closed doors about how he gave his daughter insight into the books and his own business, Regina never minded the whispers of other women in town whose only concern was when the latest shipment of fabrics from Paris would arrive in the harbor.

He never minded his daughter being able to hold herself in a conversation, valued her interest in politics and economy. The one time he'd urged her to put a book away was when she'd gotten her hands on a copy of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. She'd stopped halfway through, shocked but not surprised by the cruelty.

Regina grew up on a plantation. Her father owns several slaves. She's seen them being beaten by the overseers and while her father never supported harsh cruelty against them; her mother has always been another matter. "They're animals, Regina. They're not worthy, Regina. We are superior to them, Regina. They are uncivilized, Regina."

Though thinking about it, Regina has only ever experienced their kindness. Her wet nurse had been more of a mother than Cora. When she was little, the children never minded playing in the dirt in comparison to the children of her parent's friends. Mother never liked them though, treated them worse than the dogs... and if she knew her own daughter was responsible for helping her protector and friend Lancelot escape from the plantation up North she would drag her to the pole and whip her back bloody until she passed out.

Regina sighs and leans back against the seat closing her eyes. The journey ahead is long. It cannot be long enough.

Xxxxx

Darkness has covered the country. It started raining hours ago, and then it stopped again, leaving the area around the rails covered in thick fog. The rhythmic sound of the wheels, the constant chattering is like a mantra pulling her deeper and deeper into her circle of thoughts. Thoughts about her future, thoughts about the war and thoughts about the love she has lost forever. She can make out the silhouettes of the trees flying across the window. Ghostly shadows form into terrifying dark monsters more and more. She is scared of what the future holds, scared of her journey into the unknown.
It is only when the chattering becomes slower, less and less frequent and when the shadow monsters once again turn into trees that Regina realizes the train is coming to a halt. Most people are sleeping, not noticing the change in speed but the few who do press their noses against the window, trying to make out why the train is stopping.

They cannot have reached Charleston just yet; there are a few more hours to go. Perhaps it's a patrol because of the war; perhaps they have to stop to load cargo. Mary Margaret is sleeping next to her, a hand knitted blanket wrapped around her delicate figure. She looks like an angel. Almost. Regina's gaze wanders up to her mother who is frowning out the window.

The second Regina realizes something is going on is when the conductor hurries through the cabin with a confused expression on his face. The horn signals, cutting through the silence of the night. People wake up, some annoyed, some disoriented.

"Why are we stopping?" someone asks, a hint of panic swinging in their voice.

"There's no need to worry, Ladies and Gentlemen!" The conductor says, almost yells, indicating that yes, clearly something is wrong.

The locomotive comes to a halt at a small station, which Regina cannot quite make out through the opposite windows, as she is sitting on the wrong side of the train.

The cabin is filled with hushed whispers and mumbling, husbands trying to comfort their wives, mothers trying to quiet their children. Mary Margaret stirs beside Regina, her eyes fluttering open.

"What's happening?"

"Nothing, dear. Go back to sleep."

The girl cannot though. Not when the conductor enters the cabin, hands raised above his head. There are two men behind him. Their faces are covered with a bandeau, rifles pointed at the conductor's back. The door from the back of the cabin opens and another man is stepping inside. Women start screaming, Mary Margaret claws her fingernails into Regina's arm.

A shot sounds, hitting through the ceiling, causing the passengers to silence immediately.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," the conductor starts but is rudely interrupted by one of the men behind him.

"Everybody out of the cabin and onto the platform. One wrong move and your head will make an acquaintance with the bullet in this rifle. On the way out, a colleague of mine will be collecting some precious belongings of yours. You'd do well to give them willingly. We don't mind cutting a few fingers off for pretty rings."

"Move it, people!" The third man who is waiting at the back, rifle ready to shot yells.

"What do we do, Regina?" Mary Margaret whispers, eyes brimming with tears. Regina watches as the people start moving out of the cabin, some women dutifully removing their rings, bracelets and necklaces while some men try hard to hide their watches deeper inside their pockets.

"We should do what they say."

"This is unbelievable!" Cora hisses as she gets up, leading the way out of the train. For a second Regina wonders whether her mother will resist giving the bandits her expensive pearl necklace, a gift from one of the more dubious acquaintances of hers. Cora is a lot but not stupid though, so she removes her necklace and the matching earrings reluctantly and drops them into a brown linen bag.
As Regina steps down the stairs, she notices the small sign of the train station. *Mist Haven*. Her heart skips a beat.

"Brooch!" the man with the linen bag mumbles. Another one points his rifle at her. Regina's blood runs cold. Right. The brooch. The last thing she has of him, taken away by bandits on the journey toward her own personal hell. It couldn't be more fitting. Carefully and with a lot of regret, Regina removes the golden drawn bow and arrow, which covers a large golden R from her chest and drops it into the bag.

"Move it, woman!" the man next to her says. Regina frowns at the familiarity of the voice. Her eyes shot up, finding dark eyes and a dark forehead covered by a black bandeau. She knows the voice, has seen the eyes hundreds of times. The recognition is clear on her face, her eyes wide in shock. The man himself lowers his eyes in shame before he takes a deep breath and points the rifle at her chest.

"I said move it, woman!"

"Go, Regina!" Mary Margaret urges, tears streaming down her face. The girl is terrified and frankly, she is, too. They are in the middle of nowhere, enclosed by a large group of bandits who must have planned the raid at *Mist Haven* carefully, probably months in advance.

The passengers are asked to line up on the platform, hands raised into the air. Regina is about to walk over to her mother but one of the men shove her into another direction toward the end of the platform.

One of the male passengers, Regina thinks she's seen him at their plantation before steps forward, ready to pull a revolver and shoot one of the bandits, but the other man is quicker. Albert Spencer falls down onto his knees, his face hitting the hard wooden planks of the platform with a thud. Women are screaming hysterically, grasping at the nearest man for support and protection. Nobody dares to make another move.

A horse approaches in quick gallop, a girl of Indian heritage yells something into the night, on and on, before she passes by and vanishes into the trees.

"The sheriff is coming!"

Chaos breaks loose. The bandits hurry up, urge the people to go back into the train, which is firing the engine again. A couple of bandits clear the rails off the tree trunks they have piled up in order to make it stop. Shots are being fired.

People are dashing for the train, desperate to get back inside. Regina sees her mother as one of the first to enter the train, Mary Margaret close behind her, desperately looking through the crowd in order to find her. She wants to leave as well, thinks it best to just get on the train no matter the class but an arm wraps around her hips from behind, pulling her back. The train's signal sounds, there is steam everywhere.

She wants to protest, wants to yell, and tries to get the man's hands off her as her head is covered with a bag. Regina can hear the train moving, fights against the strong hold but someone else gets a hold of her, grasping her arms almost painfully.

"Quiet, Miss Regina. *Please.*"

So it is him, Regina thinks bitterly as she tries to free herself despite knowing she is too weak against the strong hold of two men, one of them her former protector and friend. Lancelot. The
slave she let escape, the slave she helped escape. And this is how he thanks her?

"Let me go!" She yells through the bag almost choking when she is gagged with a rolled up bandeau on top of the bag. It is hard to breathe now, the fabric barely letting any fresh air through. The only thing she can do is scream as she is being dragged off the platform and lifted onto something she thinks is a wagon.

The train is long gone.

Xxxxx

She is sitting in a barn on an uncomfortable chair. It smells like hay and dung and sheep. Sheep smell. Well, it could be worse: they could have picked a pig's barn to keep her hostage. The journey here only took a few minutes down the road, which confuses her. If the sheriff is on the way to the station wouldn't it be better to let her free instead of keeping her hostage? What do they want?

The door of the barn opens, hinges squeaking. "She's right there, Sir."

Lancelot. Her blood begins boiling again. His betrayal has hit her deep, feels like a stab in the back.

"Please take off the strings. I cannot bear seeing her bound up like this."

She is dreaming, she must be. The lack of air has made her feel dizzy for a while now. It… it can't be!

The gag around her mouth is loosened, the bag quickly pulled off her head the same moment the ropes that bind her hands together are cut. Regina blinks at the light of the lanterns which cover the barn into a dim light and when she is finally able to focus, she sees him. He has knelt down in front of her so he is on eyelevel, his face a mixture of emotion.

"Regina."

"Robin!" she cries, lunging forward into his waiting arms, knocking them both to the ground. She holds onto him so tight, promising herself to never let go again. He smells the same, a mixture of forest and tea and gunpowder.

"I thought I'd never see you again." Her body is shaking now, the exertion of the past few days finally comes crashing down.

"Don't cry my love, I'm here. I'm here. I got you." His words are soothing balm on her broken soul as she clings onto him even more tightly, tears wetting his suit.

She can hear Lancelot leaving them alone as they lie in the straw, holding onto each other for dear life until Regina has finally calmed down. He's peppering her face with kisses now. Soft little pecks all over her face. She looks a mess… a beautiful mess nonetheless.

"How?" Regina asks. "How… How are you here?"

"I received your letter."

She swallows heavily, recites the words in her mind as they have burned themselves into her memory.

"I received it just in time to call in enough favors in order to break you free."
Slowly the wheels start turning in her head as the pieces of the puzzle fall together. "The raid at Mist Haven… that was…"

"Me," Robin grins, pressing a kiss onto her stunned mouth. "Well, technically a few of my men and people who owed me. I couldn't be there myself. The danger of someone recognizing me would have threatened the whole mission. I was watching from afar though. Here."

Regina looks down into his outstretched hand. "My brooch!" she exclaims as she recognizes the familiar golden brooch he has given her upon their last meeting. "I thought they took it."

"All that mattered was the most precious cargo on this train… you," he smiles, kissing her once again. She lets him, enjoys the intimate moment and the fact she gets to see him one more time, before… before…

"Robin… what are we doing?"

"We will take the horses up to Georgetown. I have a ship waiting for us in Winyah Bay, ready to depart for England the moment we step foot on it. My friend the Captain can marry us right on the ship and…"

"England?" Regina whispers, shaking her head. She takes a step back, instantly missing his warmth and comfort. "Robin I… I can't just run away with you to England."

Surprise covers his face. He has anticipated many a reaction, this one though, was none of them. "Regina… There is nothing here for you… You were on your way into a loveless marriage with a man the same age as your father, damned to play mother to a child you despise. I… I just moved heaven and earth to be with you again, to get you out of this train. I put my men's lives in danger all because I love you! Now you're telling me you cannot leave this unhappy place behind? Your country is at war, Regina! People say it will be over in a few weeks but what happens if it takes years?"

"Robin… Robin." She cups his face with her hands, tries to make him look at her. "I appreciate everything you have risked for me tonight. I… I cannot imagine how dangerous this raid must have been for everyone involved but… I cannot just leave my father, Robin. He'd die of the thought that his daughter has been kidnapped by bandits."

"Regina…"

"No." She shakes her head. "No, Robin. I cannot leave without his blessing and knowing he is alright." Regina is determined. She kisses Robin, ready to head for the exit when the door opens once again.

Lancelot steps inside, eyes lowered to the ground, followed by…

"Daddy?"

The father-daughter reunion is sweet and more emotional on both sides than either one of them would have expected. "Daddy what are you doing here?"

"Helping this young gentleman over here to save you from a life I never wanted for you. Regina," her father takes her hands into his. He's aged quickly lately, the distress over the war and his daughter's forced marriage keeping his every thought occupied. "I only ever wanted you to be happy. And the only time I've ever seen you truly happy was whenever you came back from one of your secret meetings with the young thief over there who stole my dearest daughter's heart."

She is blushing, Robin and her both are.
"I've never been happy with your mother, you know as much. But I want it to be different for you. I want you to marry for love and not for profit - though as Mr. Locksley over there has reassured me, this will not ever be a concern of yours. Now. Do you love him, darling?"

"With all my heart," Regina whispers.

"Then what are you waiting for?" Henry says.

Robin steps forward as she hugs her father goodbye, thanking him once again for his help before he escorts Regina over to their horses. Lancelot is already waiting.
On the way to Georgetown, Regina learns how Robin met Lancelot in New York and recognized the freed slave immediately. He told him everything about the arranged marriage between Leopold and Regina even before he received her letter. She had originally addressed to his London office, but it fell into the hands of one of his men who forwarded it to his friend John Little, the head of his New York office. They had a little less than two weeks to plan how to free her when Robin met her father in Charlotte. The Englishman had been willing to pay a high price for his daughter's hand, but it turned out her father already made plans on his own, involving a raid during which she got lost. They worked together on freeing her, asking several friends and slaves to help with the promise of freedom afterwards.

"Master Henry let everyone go shortly after you left, Miss Regina. He could have killed me but he didn't."

It takes them three days on horseback to reach Georgetown, where they part ways. Lancelot heads north while Robin and Regina head for the largest ship in the harbor with the brightest white sails she has ever seen. The Jolly Roger.

As Captain Jones lets his crew set the sails and Robin and Regina watch the coastline of North Carolina disappear at the horizon, he wraps his arms around her waist and kisses her cheek, takes her hand and goes down on one knee.

She recognizes the ring immediately, as it is the one her father showed her all these years ago. "I never got to ask the women I love to marry me so I hope one day someone who loves you more than all riches of the world will be able to give this ring to you."

"Yes," Regina says before he even gets to finish asking his question. "A thousand times yes."

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