

Sally's Secret Ambition

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Written by Ann Weil • Illustrated by David Cockcroft

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Correlation

LEVEL T	
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Reading Recovery	38
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The United States of America during the Civil War (1861-1865)

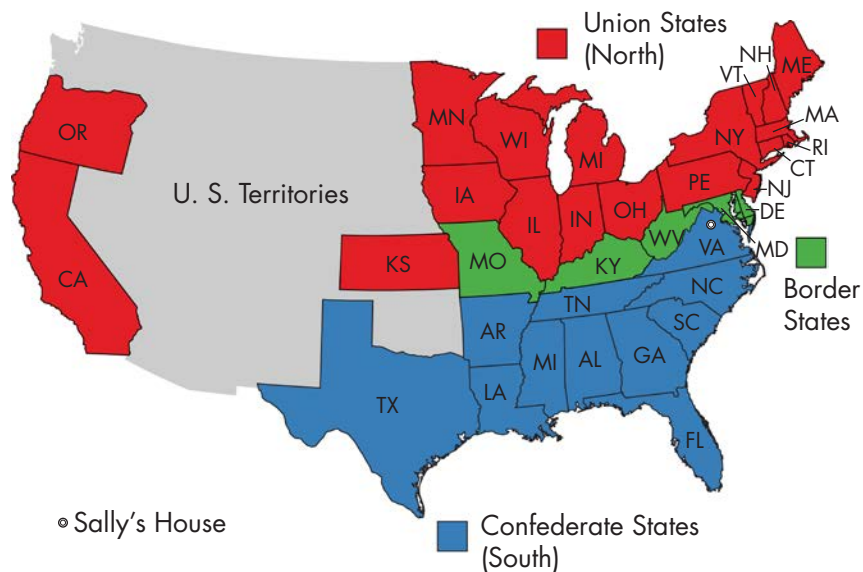


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Chapter One

The War Between the States had begun last year. The North was fighting the South. Fathers were fighting sons; brothers were fighting each other. Sally was thankful as she set the table that her family had not been torn apart by this terrible war.

Sally could smell the bacon cooking in the kitchen. She knew that she and her family were lucky. They had enough food to eat. Other families did not. The prices for food had gone way up when the war started.

Many families had already lost sons and brothers to the war. Sally was thankful that her father and brother had not gone to fight.

Sally's father was a **surgeon**. He took care of soldiers who were hurt fighting in the war, and Sally's brother Alexander helped him. Sally wanted to help her father, too. She had watched him closely over the years. She practiced what she learned by bandaging wounds on her dolls. Now she could help injured animals. But her mother discouraged her interest in being a doctor. She would say, "I need your help at home. Besides, no man wants a surgeon for a wife."



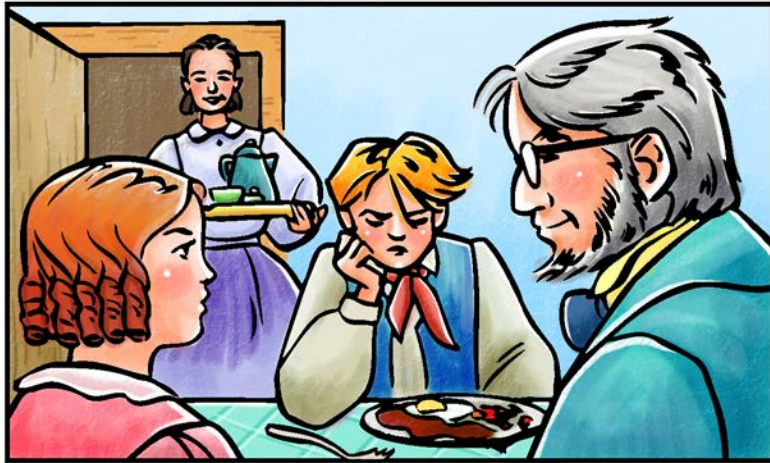
Sally finished setting the table for breakfast. Her mother brought in the food and put it on the dining table. Sally rang a small silver bell to let her father and brother know that breakfast was ready.

"Good morning, Sally," said her father as he walked into the dining room. *He doesn't look as if he had been up for hours operating*, thought Sally. Her father seemed to love his work even though it was difficult. With the war, his work had him awake at all hours of the day and night.

Father gave Sally a kiss on the forehead before taking his seat at the head of the table. "What a lovely breakfast, Virginia," he said to his wife as he served himself. Then he passed the eggs to Alexander.

"Thank you, Father," said Alexander, "but I don't think I can eat this morning."

"Are you ill?" asked Virginia. Sally saw the worry on her mother's face. Their neighbors had lost their baby to illness earlier that year, and Sally's mother feared the worst when someone in their family became ill.



“The boy’s not ill, Virginia,” Sally’s father said in a booming voice. Then he chuckled. “I’m afraid our son still cannot stand the sight of an operation,” he said. “He almost fainted early this morning at the **field hospital** while I was working on a boy’s badly wounded leg.”

Alexander got the chance to do what Sally dreamed of doing. But Alexander wanted to be anything but a surgeon. Sally’s anger had risen when she realized that. It was not fair. Sally dreamed that one day she would help people as her father did. But she kept that dream a secret. She knew her mother would dig her heels in and say, “No man would want a doctor for a wife and that’s that.”

Chapter Two

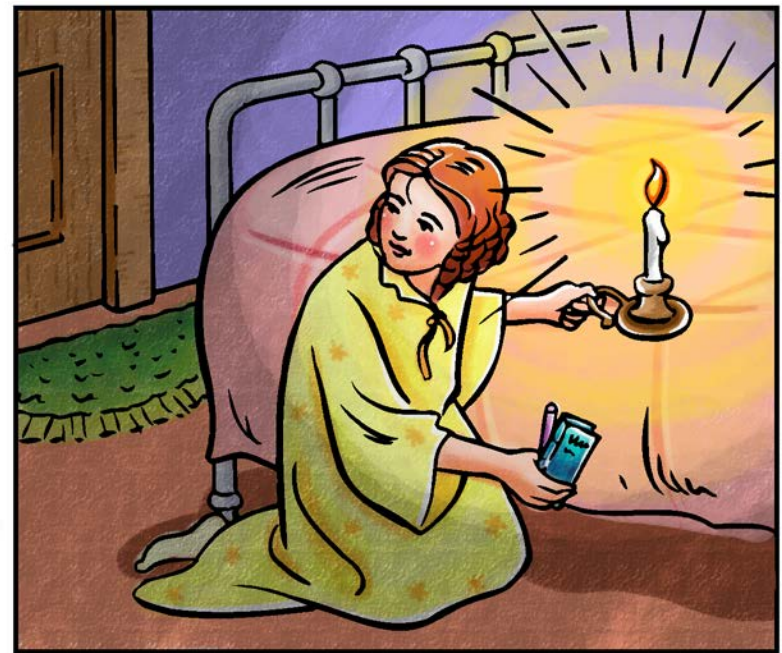
After breakfast, Sally cleared the table and washed the dishes. Then she dusted the books in her father’s study. She knew all his books by heart. When she was young, her father let her look at the pictures of the human body. He taught her the names of all the bones and organs. As Sally got older, her free time was spent sneaking into the study to read his books again and again. She hoped that one day she could persuade her parents to let her help at the field hospital. She just had to think of a way to do it, otherwise her life’s **ambition** might have to remain a dream.





Sally had been secretly watching her father do operations. She hid so he would not know she was there. At first, the sight of blood had upset her. But she reminded herself that her father was saving a life. Being able to save someone's life seemed **noble** to Sally.

Sally watched her father's operations from her secret hiding place in a closet. She snuck away from her chores every chance she got. She feared getting caught sneaking around. She did not want to upset her mother. She wanted to respect her wishes, but becoming a doctor was important to Sally. When the day came for Sally to persuade her parents, Sally wanted to be ready for it. Sally continued watching her father, and wrote down what she saw him do in a secret notebook that she kept hidden under her bed.



Chapter Three

One afternoon, Sally was alone at home doing the laundry. Her mother was at the home of a neighbor, helping other women make bandages from old sheets.

Sally heard cannon shots in the distance. *Another battle*, she thought. More wounded soldiers. She pictured her father and brother working at the field hospital, **tending** to the wounded soldiers.



Sally gathered up the clean, wet clothes from the laundry tub to take them outside to the clothesline. The clothes were piled so high in her arms that she did not see the soldier coming toward her. She nearly jumped out of her skin when he called to her. Startled, she dropped the clean laundry on the ground.

The soldier was wounded, but the cut was not too deep. Sally saw that blood was soaking through the sleeve on the soldier's uniform. She ripped one of the sheets and wrapped it tightly around his wound to stop the bleeding.



“Please, could you help my friend John,” begged the soldier. “He got shot in the leg.”

Sally ran into the house and grabbed her father’s spare medical bag. She took the ripped sheet and got some water from the well, then followed the soldier down the road. As they hurried along, the soldier introduced himself. His name was George, and he was not much older than Sally.

George’s friend was not far away. John was sitting against a tree, his leg bleeding badly. Sally gave the boy some water, then turned to treat his wound. She washed away his blood with the water, but the blood swiftly covered the wound again. She saw enough to know that a **lead** bullet was not very deep in his leg.

Sally tore a bandage from the sheet, then took the forceps from her father’s bag. She gripped the end of the bullet with the forceps and pulled it from John’s leg. Next, Sally quickly wrapped the bandage tightly around the wound to stop the bleeding. The pressure from the bandage would keep him from losing too much blood and becoming unconscious.

Once Sally was sure the bleeding had slowed, she would have to take the boy to her father.

George watched Sally work. “You bandaged his leg as well as a doctor would have,” he said, impressed with Sally’s skill. “Where did you learn to do that?”

“My father is a surgeon,” said Sally.

“He must be very proud of you,” said George. Sally hoped so, but she knew her mother would be angry if she found Sally covered in blood, wrapping bandages around men’s legs.

Sally was so lost in thought and so focused on her work that she did not hear her father and brother as they came up behind her.

“You did a good job with that bandage, Sally,” said her father.

“Better than I could do,” admitted Alexander.

Sally appreciated the praise. Then she saw her mother walking toward them.



Chapter Four

"What is going on here?" Sally's mother demanded. "Sally! Are you hurt?"

"It looks like we have another doctor in the family," explained Sally's father.

Virginia's face turned sour. "Look at your dress. It's filthy!"

"Maybe Sally can help you at the field hospital instead of me," suggested Alexander.

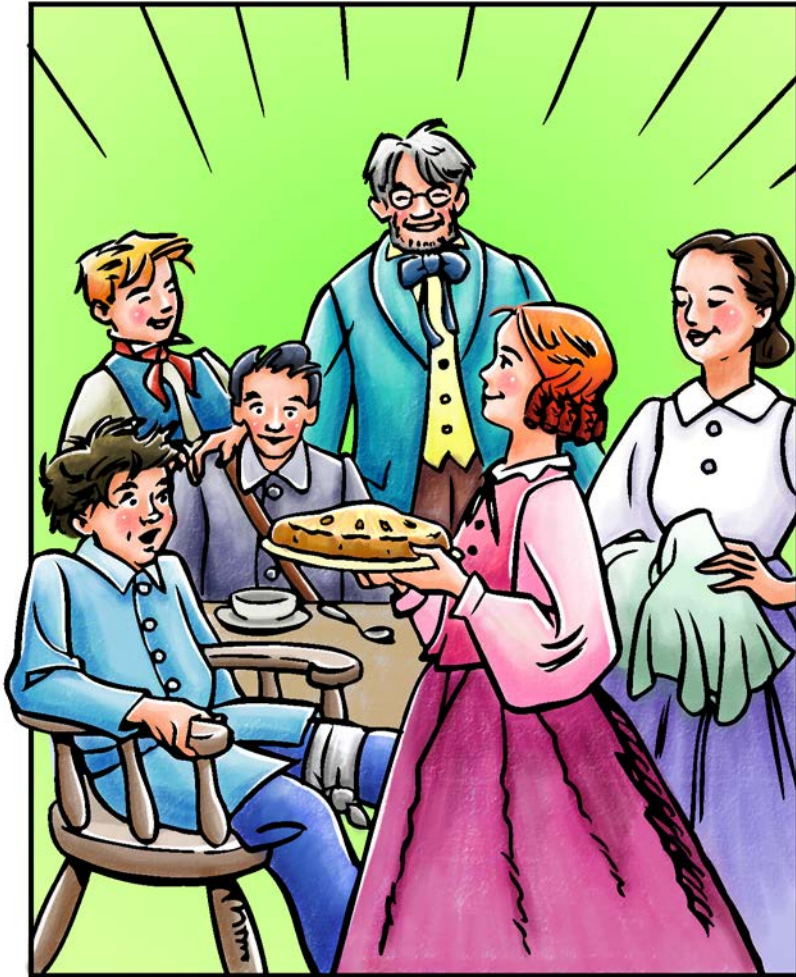
"I need Sally at home," Sally's mother insisted. "She has chores to do."

"Mother," Sally began tentatively, "I have been secretly watching Father work for years. I know what to do and what would be expected of me. I have dreamed of being a surgeon. Please let me help Father."

Sally watched as a range of emotions raced across both her parents' faces—fear, anger at having been **deceived**, and even a bit of pride.

"I don't know, Sally," Virginia said as she started to walk toward the house.

Sally's father invited the young soldiers to the house so he could check their wounds. Once that was done, Virginia offered to cook a meal for all of them. Sally helped her mother prepare and serve the food. They even served a pie for dessert.



The men were grateful for the home-cooked meal as well as to Sally for bandaging their wounds. After saying their thanks and goodbyes, they left to rejoin their troop.

"I'll clear the table," offered Alexander, eager to stay away from the field hospital.

"Sally, would you like to come to the field hospital with me?" asked her father.

Sally looked to her mother. Virginia's expression said everything. She was not pleased, but she loved her daughter too much to build a fence around her dream.



Sally gave her mother another long look, and then said yes to her father. Sally's mother helped her find **suitable** clothes for her new work. She ended up wearing some of Alexander's clothes. There were changes going on in their country, and changes at home as well.



Glossary

ambition	someone's dream or objective (p. 8)
deceived	fooled or lied to (p. 16)
field hospital	tents located near a war zone where wounded soldiers receive medical care (p. 7)
lead	a heavy, soft gray metal often used to make bullets (p. 13)
noble	having very fine, good qualities (p. 9)
suitable	right or appropriate (p. 19)
surgeon	a doctor who performs operations (p. 5)
tending	giving special attention to something or someone (p. 11)