

Kathin awoke near dawn expecting another marathon of cooking and baking for strangers. Something touched her and she bolted upright. A rough hand clamped her mouth stifling her scream. A finger slipped between her teeth and Kathin bit it.

"Ow!" The beardless filthy Rebel sucked his injured finger.

Kathin used the opportunity to squiggle from her bed and dash for the door. He grabbed her wrist and she stumbled backward. "No!"

"Oh for Christ's sake lady shut up before you have all of them up here. I'm not going to hurt you."

Kathin opened her mouth and a slap closed it for her.

"Damn lady. I'm sorry," the soldier claimed in a soft though gruff alto. "You forced me to do that. If you'd shut up and listen for a minute you'd save us both a lot of trouble."

Mollified by his apparent sincerity, Kathin rubbed her cheek and took his measure. He was no bigger than she; emaciated and unarmed. His smoke-blackened uniform was at least two sizes too big and he could have gotten a better haircut with a butcher knife. He had a narrow elongated face with a pointed chin and a nose sharp enough to chop wood: Ugly to be sure but with the tenderness of angels in divine blue eyes. "What do you want?"

"A safe place to sleep," he said.

"There are plenty of beds in the house. Why pick mine?"

"It's the only one without a man in it."

Kathin grimaced. "I intend to keep it that way."

"Fine by me." He lay back down.

"I said I don't want any man in my bed."

"I heard you," he yawned.

"So get out," Kathin demanded.

He swung his legs over the edge of the bed and began unbuttoning his uniform.

"Stop! What are you doing?"

**"Trying to sleep," he said. He opened the front of his shirt.**

**Kathin gaped. The soldier had breasts. They looked like two fried eggs on hooks but they were definitely breasts. *No doubt about it.* Kathin was thoroughly discombobulated. "God you're skinny."**

**"It helps the uniform fit." The skinny-ugly soldier grinned as she re-buttoned her shirt. "You ready to let me get some shuteye now?"**

**"Aren't you hungry," Kathin asked in one last effort to restore her privacy.**

**"No more than most," the soldier shrugged. "I thought to have some fresh bread but it was all ate up before it got to me. I was as sleepy as hungry so I looked up a hole to crawl into and here I am, but I'm sure not Goldilocks."**

**"And I'm no bear," Kathin said with a nervous chuckle.**

**"I can see that," the soldier said. "But now that you've got me good 'n' awake I'm near as hungry as one."**

**"Stay here. I'll bring you something."**

**"I'm not wounded and I ain't crippled," the soldier declared. "I'll go down and get my own."**

**"You can't go downstairs dressed like that. They'll send you to the front."**

**The soldier snickered and gazed at Kathin with blue-eyed wonder. "Where do think I got so skinny Ninny? I've been at the front of every battle from Gainesville to Gettysburg."**

**"But -- you're a woman!"**

**"You just figure that out?"**

**"Women aren't soldiers."**

**"Now you tell me. Good thing nobody told me that before I started shootin' the balls off o' Yankees. I might've missed a couple."**

**"You shouldn't say things like that."**

**"Like what? Gracious me Ninny you didn't know Yankees have balls?"**

**"Stop calling me that! I'm not a ninny."**

**"What am I supposed to call you?"**

**"My name is Mrs. Edwin Brown."**

**"Well do tell. Does Mr. Edwin Brown allow you to have any name of your own?"**

**"What?"**

**"What do I call you? Folks call me Jo. They think it stands for Joseph."**

**"Hello Josephine. I'm Kathin."**

**"Fine," said Jo. "But I'm nobody's Josephine. I'm Jo! Now that we've got all that straight, can we eat?"**