



A Child Went Forth

Susan Victoria Foster

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On a chilly October morning in 1858, ten-year-old Jim Peck remains alone beside the fresh Kentucky grave of his mother. He struggles to gather his memories before they are blown across the weathered headstones and out of his life forever. Later that night, the sting of desertion deepens when his distraught father leaves Jim and his four younger siblings in the care of their Aunt Sally and Uncle Zur. As the children grapple with their personal loss, an even larger tragedy begins to seep through the cracks of their already fragile world. Neighbors line up against neighbors as Kentuckians are forced to choose between the Blue and the Grey, and family loyalties are tested and sometimes broken.

Over the next few years, the Civil War encircles the border state with the inescapable certainty of a hangman's noose. While further south, Georgia and the Carolinas boast of loyalty to the Confederate Cause, the drums of valor grow muffled while reaching northward and eastward across the Barren River and along Peters Creek. As a border state, Kentucky cuts its veins open with dissention, leaving even its children marked by the stains of war.

Walt Whitman wrote of a child who goes forth every day, and as he looks upon the world, he becomes that world. Jim Peck looks upon death, desertion, and bitter conflict at a young age, but as he grows, he also perceives compassion, hope, and humor in those around him. At a time when Kentucky must bury her dead and nurture her wounded, Jim reaches deep and uncovers his own compassion, hope, and humor waiting patiently alongside his best-protected memories.

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