

Heroines Behind the Lines

CIVIL WAR
BOOK 3

YANKEE *in*
ATLANTA

JOCELYN GREEN

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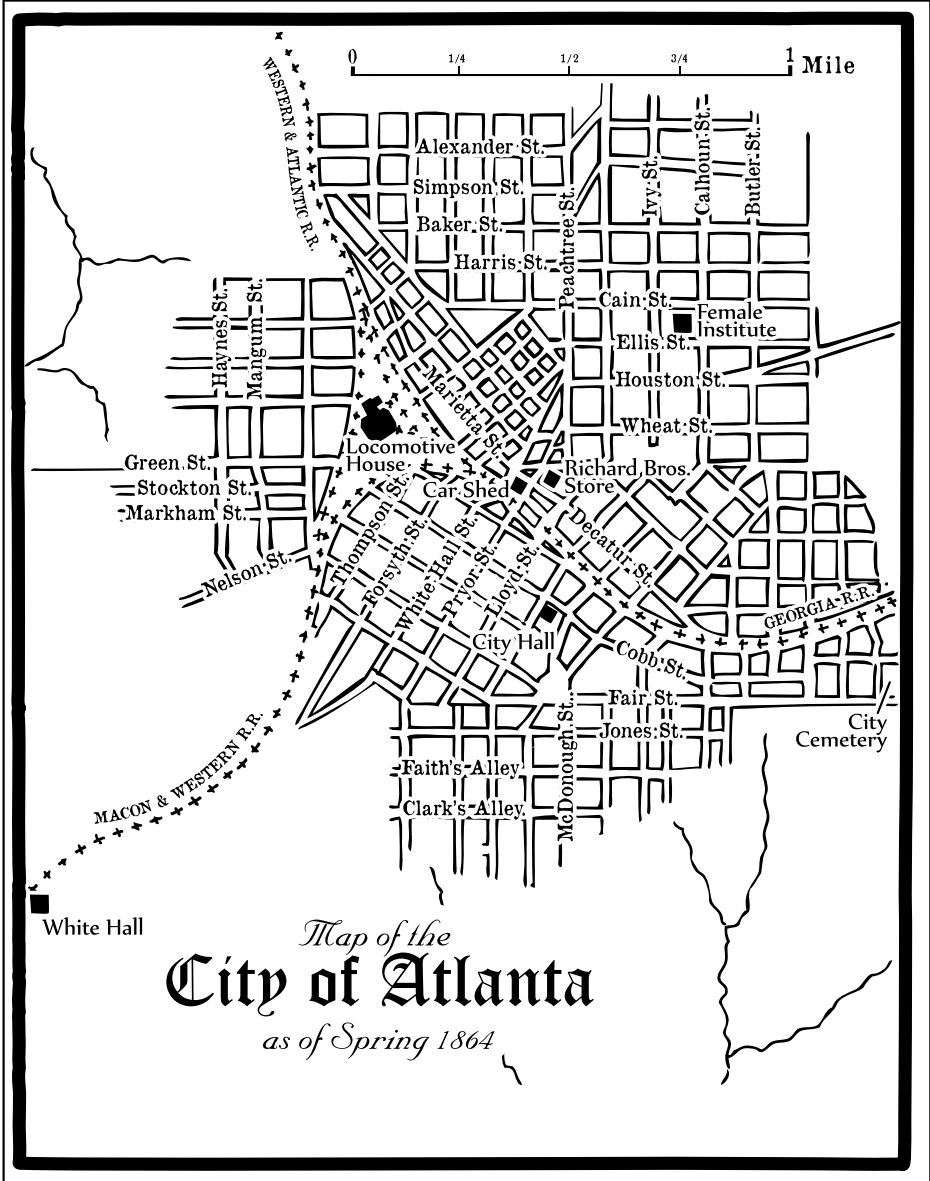
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*To Jason and Audrey
It is only distance that separates us.
And to divided families everywhere.
May your hearts be joined even if your hands cannot be.*

*God sets the lonely in families.
Psalm 68:6*







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A Note on the City of Atlanta

So far as civil war is concerned, we have no fears of that in Atlanta.” So proclaimed the Atlanta Daily Intelligencer shortly after a Georgia convention voted to secede by a margin of only 2 percent. The day after the vote, the earth literally cracked, rattling Atlanta but causing no damage. “May not its coming and passing away so easily,” wrote the paper’s editor, “with the clear and bright sky, be symbolical of the present political convulsion in the country, which in the South will pass away so easily, leaving the spotless sky behind.”

He could not have been more wrong. Founded in 1836 as a dusty frontier town at the end of the railroad tracks, Atlanta soared to significance during the Civil War—or War Between the States—becoming the second most important city in the Confederacy, after Richmond. As it rose in prominence as a manufacturing, transportation, medical, and government center, the population surged from 11,000 people before the war, to 20,000 by 1863. The booming city was home to both the upright and the unsavory, to staunch Rebels and secret Unionists. As

war encroached upon the city, every able-bodied man was pressed into service.

A small portion of Atlanta enjoyed extravagant wealth. Most were middle-class families, many driven to poverty and homelessness by the end of the war. But before Sherman's army ever set foot in Georgia, and regardless of their loyalties, the women on the home front were squeezed by the blockade, hunted by hunger, plagued by uncertainty, and still played hostess to refugees and convalescents. Though their strength is often passed over in the tale of Sherman's fire, they were heroines behind the lines.

As Atlanta rose on the tide of war, so it would be crushed by it. *Yankee in Atlanta* is a story of conflicting loyalties, divided families, and hearts refined by fire.



Saturday, May 31, 1862
The Virginia Peninsula

Not now. Please, not now. Rebel bullets ripped through the sulfurous fog hovering above Caitlin McKae's head. Her middle cramping violently, she prayed her anguished bowels would not betray her. *Not now.*

"Don't let them take my leg, please! I'd rather die on the field!"

"We're getting you out of here, Marty!" Caitlin fairly shouted as she and the other three stretcher bearers carried the wounded soldier a quarter mile to the rear. Sweat poured from beneath her kepi and itched across her tightly bound torso. River water from the rain-swollen Chickahominy soaked through her brogans, and she faltered more than once in the red clay quagmire.

Head pounding like a fusillade, Caitlin slogged back through the mud to pluck more wounded comrades from the spongy earth. She scrambled after the other stretcher bearers and wondered how long this desperate battle for Richmond had lasted so far. Had an hour passed?

Two hours? Three? Suddenly spent, Caitlin doubled over, gripping her knees. Her stomach heaved, though it had no contents to vacate.

But her body wasn't through. Her insides churning, Caitlin was left with no choice but to break away to the furthest pine tree she could make it to and find relief in relative privacy behind its trunk.

Before she could reach it, a lead ball tore through her arm. The twisting pain in her middle paled as fire blazed through her right bicep. The bullet had ripped completely through.

As she dropped to her knees, Caitlin's thundering pulse dimmed the sounds of battle. With fumbling fingers, she unbuttoned her jacket with her left hand, wriggled free of it, and wrapped it around her bloody shirtsleeve. *I could go back. I can still hold the stretcher with my left hand.* But she couldn't. Strength sapped from her body, her limbs felt as though they'd been filled with lead.

Flat on her back now, Caitlin tried to steady her breathing. *The sky is still blue*, she told herself. *Somewhere, far above me, where bullets cannot reach and cries cannot be heard, the sky is still blue.* The haze of gun smoke thinned, and she caught a glimpse of Professor Lowe's balloon *Intrepid* hovering in the sky, with Lowe inside, reporting Confederate troop movements to General McClellan. Her eyelids drifted closed and she imagined herself there. *But if I were, I would cut the lines tethering it to the ground and sail away, far away from war and disease and death. If only it weren't for Jack.* Her thoughts trailed away, into a blank expanse as welcoming as the sky.

Mud splattered her face as another bullet pierced the ground next to her. Suddenly, her ears tuned to the musket fire still rattling in the air. Rolling over, Caitlin dragged herself into the pine trees, leaned against a trunk and felt the earth shudder beneath her with the booming of artillery.

"God, when will it end?" she groaned through gritted teeth.

"Soon." Caitlin turned toward the gravelly voice and found a bearded Rebel soldier. Mosquitoes hummed near his bleeding stomach. He would die within hours, even if he were in a hospital. "You're bleed-

ing, too.” He nodded to her crimson-soaked arm. Her jacket-turned-tourniquet must have fallen off when she’d crawled here for shelter. “Take mine. I’ll not be needing it now.”

“Thank you,” she breathed, and let him help her tie his jacket to her arm. Gooseflesh raised on her skin as the sweat filming her body turned cold.

“Can you read?” He handed her a small New Testament with Psalms and Proverbs. “Do you know the one about the valley of the shadow of death? I reckon that ought to do.” His face was so pale. Surely he was in that valley now.

Though her mind began to fog, with her left hand, she flipped to Psalm 23, and forced her voice through chattering teeth. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies . . .”

Caitlin’s eyelids refused to stay open. She was sinking, deeper, and imagined the Virginia swamp was swallowing her whole. Her grip loosened on the Bible in her hand, and her consciousness slipped fully beyond her grasp.

Thursday, June 19, 1862

Lips cinched tightly, Caitlin McKae fought the instinct to reach toward the smoldering pain in her arm—the pain that had dragged her back to consciousness and told her she had survived.

Where am I? She shook her head, hoping to clear the fog. Flies droned lazily about the room. Muffled voices swam toward her from the hallway while the air sat thick and heavy on her skin. Beyond the shuttered window, locomotives bellowed and chugged.

Where is Jack? “Please,” she prayed through cracked lips. “Keep him safe . . .”

“Well looky here.” The door creaked, and a wedge of light broadened on the floor, framing a stocky silhouette. The odor of corn liquor

seeped from his grey uniform as he stepped to her bedside, peering past his mustache at her. “Look who’s finally awake. I got a whole heap a questions for you, girly-girl.”

Oh no. Her hand flew to her heart, felt it hammering against her palm with only one threadbare sheet between. The binding around her chest was gone.

“That’s a fact.” He chuckled. “Your secret is out now, so you might as well fess up directly.” One hand flexed around a club while the other rested on a revolver in its holster. His lips curled into a grin.

The alarm clanging in Caitlin’s mind rivaled the screeching steel of a steam engine grinding to a halt outside.

“Ain’t you got something to say for yourself? For starters, how could such a pretty girl such as yourself come to this? Leastwise, maybe you was pretty once.” He reached for her, wearing the same possessive expression she had seen too often before.

“Don’t touch me,” she whispered, trying in vain to knock his hand away. When he laughed and called her “playful,” she spit in his face, dormant anger and fear combusting in her veins.

Cursing, the officer ground his club into her bandaged arm. A gasp escaped her as searing pain ushered her back to the moment the bullet first tore through her flesh.

“George Washington Lee, you get out of here this instant!” The club fell away, and Caitlin, nearly breathless, blinked up at the blessed interruption—a silver-haired woman, blue eyes blazing, cheeks flushed. “How dare you treat her this way?”

“And just who is she, Miss Periwinkle?” Coughing racked Lee’s body until he dabbed his mouth with a handkerchief. “She reeks of espionage.”

Caitlin sat up, pulling the sheet up over her chest, and swallowed the moan bubbling up from the pain.

“Of course not.” The woman jabbed her finger toward the man, stood with one fist propped on her ample hips. “She has more patriotism in the tip of her freckled nose than a regiment of conscripts. Why else would she fight for the cause?”

“I am not a spy,” Caitlin broke in.

Lee’s eyes brightened. “You see! You heard it for yourself, she is a Northerner!”

“She’s Irish, and you know as well as I do that we have plenty of immigrants in these parts, and them as loyal to the cause as you are.” Her tone was thick with disdain.

“I would beg you to remember that as the provost marshal of this fine city, it is my oath-bound duty to ferret out deserters, spies, foreigners, Northern sympathizers, and any other such like as would be harmful to the good of our country.”

“Humph! I would beg you to remember I changed your diapers when you were still in short dresses, young man.” Miss Periwinkle snapped open the wooden shutters and light flooded the small space. “You’ll not bully me or anyone in this establishment or you may find the good doctor not nearly so inclined to oblige that nasty cough of yours. Now good day to you.”

“Do be advised, Miss McKae.” Colonel Lee leaned against the doorway again. “We do not abide spies in our midst.”

“I told you, I am not a spy.”

“Funny. That’s what all seven of those Yankee devils said, all the way to the gallows. The Andrews raiders said they were Union soldiers, but they were dressed as civilians when they tried stealing our train. As I said, we do not abide spies. No matter what they’re wearing.” His eyes seemed to bore through hers.

Though she did not blink, Caitlin hugged the sheet to her chest as she watched him leave.

Miss Periwinkle bustled back to Caitlin’s side. “I’m so sorry about that, dear. Rude introductions, indeed.”

Blood still rushing in her ears, Caitlin wore a tight mask of counterfeit composure as Miss Periwinkle prattled on. “I’m Prudence. Now drink this tea of dandelion root for the pain in your shoulder. I do wish we had some opium for you, but Lil Bit says our tea will do nicely.”

“I do wish you’d stop calling me that around the patients, Prudence.”

A white-haired gentleman stepped to Caitlin's bedside, one hand cradling a pipe and the other resting on the stethoscope about his neck. "Older by fourteen months, and my sister still won't let me forget it." The doctor placed the stethoscope on Caitlin's chest, listening. "You gave us quite a scare, my dear."

"What happened?" Her voice creaked. She struggled to sweep the remaining cobwebs from her mind.

"Quite simply, the Richmond hospitals ran out of room after the Battle of Seven Pines, so they shuttled all who could safely be moved down to us. You've had a hard go of it, my girl. Your wound was only part of your trouble. By the time you arrived here, you were in the throes of typho-malarial fever, and unconscious. I imagine you had been for days. Do you remember any of this?"

Caitlin pressed her fingers to her aching forehead while snatches of memory flickered over her. The wrenching abdominal pain, headache, nausea, fever, and chills. The bullet that tore through her arm, and the Rebel who gave her his jacket as a tourniquet. "I remember some," she whispered, mind still reeling.

"Your Bible is right here, dear." Prudy handed a small volume to her.

"My Bible?" Caitlin opened the cover. *To the Confederacy's Defenders in the 18th Georgia, Co. A. With regards, Chaplain Samuel York.* It was the Rebel's Bible. She'd been reading it when she passed out. Slowly, the pieces fit together. It must been in her hand when Confederate medical officers found her and carried her off the field. To Jack and the rest of her own regiment, she was now missing in action.

Dr. Periwinkle unwound a bandage on her upper arm. "It's a miracle the ball passed through you without shattering the bone," he murmured while inspecting the entry and exit wounds. "There is still risk of infection and secondary hemorrhage." He paused, stroked his handlebar mustache downward. "You remind me so of my own daughter, when she was about your age. And you'll be fine, Miss McKae."

The words pricked Caitlin's ears. "How do you know my name?"

Prudence raised her eyebrows. “You told us yourself, dear. But you were in the fever’s grip and I reckon you’ve forgotten the worst of it.”

Her heart plunged. “Where am I?”

“Periwinkle Place boarding house. Since war came, we care for convalescents here, too. Wounded Rebels come in from all over to us, on account of our railroads. Lil Bit brought you to me directly so you may recover with privacy, now that you won’t be soldiering anymore.”

“The South has sent its sons to war—including mine—but we need not send our daughters.” The twinkle returned to the doctor’s eyes. “Your patriotism does you credit, child, but it’s time you just get well and stop pretending to be someone you’re not. No more soldiering, all right? You’re safe now, in Atlanta.”

Atlanta. The Gate City to the South.

Caitlin’s spirit flagged, but her face betrayed nothing. She may be able to get well here, but to stop pretending and reveal her true identity would never do.

Then again, this would be the last place anyone would look for Caitlin McKae.

Including Jack. The void he left in her heart ached already. And yet, the price she had paid to be with him had exacted a toll only another veteran could understand. Closing her eyes, she allowed herself to imagine a life without marching, drilling, fighting, suffering. A life so far from her past she could stop looking over her shoulder for it.

She would start over again in Atlanta and make this place her home, at least until she had the means to leave. She had reinvented herself before. She could do it again. She would have to.

This is not the end, she told herself. *It is only a new beginning.*

“ATLANTA HAS BEEN since the commencement of the revolution—a point of rendezvous of traitors, Swindlers, extortionist, and Counterfeiters. The population as a predominant element is a mixture of Jews, New England Yankees, and refugees shirking military duties.”

~COL. GEORGE WASHINGTON LEE, Provost
Marshall of Atlanta

“WE HAVE LEARNED our lessons well—can cry when we would laugh—and laugh when we would cry . . . The face must keep its color—white or red—though the heart stops beating or flames up in scorching pain.”

~CYRENA STONE, Unionist Atlanta resident

Act One



LOYALTIES IN THE BALANCE



Chapter One

Atlanta, Georgia
Sunday, July 5, 1863

*T*raitor.

A rifle butt slammed between Caitlin's shoulder blades, pitching her forward on the narrow plank. Stumbling, she righted herself again, wrists bound behind her. A dangling rope brushed her face.

How could you?

She squinted up at the voice, edged with hatred yet still familiar. *Jack?* He was bleeding from his chest.

His hazel eyes blazed. *You did this to me.*

No!

If you do not stand with me, you stand against me.

The noose was around her neck now, burning like live coals. *It is only distance that separates us!*

He shook his head, his hair curling over one eye. *It is everything that separates us. The chasm can never be crossed.*

Caitlin looked past Jack to the shallow grave behind him. The seven bodies of the Andrews raiders lay decomposing into one brittle mass. But there was room for one more. Terror pulsed in her ears.

I had no choice!

You made your choice. To be one of them.

I am one of you!

You are neither.

A single kick to the scaffold beneath her feet, and—

“Jack!” With a scream in her throat and fists clenching her collar, Caitlin burst from her nightmare into the hot breath of Atlanta. *Surviving in enemy country is not a betrayal!* She railed against her recurring dream. *I am not a turncoat!*

A knock on the door. “Caitlin? It’s me, Minnie.” She knocked again. “I haven’t got my key.” Caitlin sat up and rolled her neck. The residual fear of her nightmare dissolved under her roommate’s muffled drawl. “You didn’t fall asleep on your books again, did you honey?”

At nineteen years of age, Minerva Taylor was four years younger than Caitlin, and she called everyone honey, whether she was truly fond of them or not. As the Atlanta Female Institute’s music teacher whose pupils ranged from the talented to the uncooperative, it was a capacity that proved to be as diplomatic as it was habitual.

Caitlin tripped on a dog-eared book as she went to open her door. “What else is a Sunday afternoon for if not reading and napping?”

Minnie shook her head of perfectly coifed sunshine-blond hair, her face radiant in spite of the pockmark scarring. Parasol in hand, she stepped into the room and shut the door behind her, muting the rowdy conversations of the other boarders at Periwinkle Place. “Reading for pleasure I could understand. But something tells me you’re preparing for your classes. On a Sunday!” She plucked the worn volume from the floor. “Why, we’re almost out for the summer! You’re such a bluestocking!”

Caitlin’s grin faltered. Her classes were the best thing about Atlanta. When they ended for summer break, she would sincerely miss teaching.

Perhaps the Southern sun had addled her brain for her to not hate living here the way she once did. Atlanta had given Caitlin what New York City could not. A way to survive without marrying. Or soldiering.

She pasted a smile back into place. “And who’s to say I don’t find pleasure in *Paradise Lost*?”

“You would.” Minnie laughed, her grey eyes dancing. “But tell the truth. It’s in your curriculum too, isn’t it?”

“What kind of a literature instructor would I be if it weren’t?” The fact that Caitlin was a literature instructor at all was no small miracle. But the Atlanta Female Institute was only three years old, and with the war calling the men away, in dire need of teachers. Caitlin had been offered the position vacated by an enlisting soldier as a personal favor from the principal to Dr. Periwinkle. That they believed her to be a Confederate veteran had worked to her benefit, as well.

“What about you?” Caitlin asked, twisting her shoulder-length, cinnamon-colored hair back into place beneath her pins. “Don’t you play the piano and sing when you’re not in class?”

“Of course I do. But this?” She read the text with a hint of vibrato: “‘Live while ye may, Yet happy pair; enjoy till I return, Short pleasures; for long woes are to succeed . . . ’ That’s just morbid, honey!”

“What’s morbid is how you completely murdered the iambic pentameter!”

Minnie shrugged. “I’ve got to let you be better than me in *something*. Aside from shooting a gun, that is.” Her dimples deepened in rosy cheeks, as they always did when she teased.

“Let’s leave the past where it lies. I’ve certainly won few friends with mine.”

“I know you don’t like to talk about your soldiering in the army, but the truth is, I only wish I were as brave as you so I could lick some Yankees myself!”

But Caitlin had not felt brave in battle. Not with lead tearing toward her and cannons shaking the earth beneath her. Not with men unraveling around her like rag dolls in the mouth of an unseen beast. Not

with her lifeblood seeping out of her. She'd been terrified then, and the recollections jangled her still. "Never wish for a fight, Minnie. It is a horrid thing."

"But for a just and righteous cause such as ours—"

"For any cause."

Minnie laid a hand on her arm. "I've upset you. I'm sorry, honey." Her gaze traveled to the white line on Caitlin's jaw, likely assuming it was a mark from the war, and Caitlin did not correct her. "Come, let's go for a stroll."

By the time they stepped out onto Alabama Street, Caitlin's heart rate had almost returned to its normal pace. Apple peels and peanut shells crunched beneath every step along the busy dirt road where soldiers swarmed between local residents and travelers.

When two Rebels half-bowed in their direction, Minnie trilled the chorus of the ever-popular Bonnie Blue Flag. "Hurrah! Hurrah! For Southern rights hurrah! Hurrah for the Bonnie Blue Flag that bears a single star."

Caitlin smiled at her friend's beautiful soprano voice, but could not stop the Battle Cry of Freedom from running through her own mind at the same time.

*The Union forever! Hurrah, boys, hurrah!
Down with the traitors, up with the stars;
While we rally round the flag, boys, rally once again,
Shouting the battle cry of freedom!*

"That one's looking at you," Minnie whispered.

Caitlin kept her gaze straight ahead. "Not likely. Or necessary."

"Don't you want to find a beau?"

"No."

"Why ever not? With your education, you could secure quite a husband."

"With my education, I don't need a husband." She arched an eye-

brow. "I can make my own way."

Minnie's jaw dropped. "You don't mean you'd rather have 'single blessedness' instead."

"I most certainly do."

Their conversation stalled at the corner of Whitehall Street and the railroad tracks. Knots of women and old men huddled in silent groups outside Wittgenstein's saloon.

"What is it?" Minnie asked a woman nearby.

"There is news." She nodded to the second floor of the building, the *Atlanta Daily Intelligencer* office. "If we can but survive the waiting for it."

Minnie blanched and gripped Caitlin's hand. "Father." *Jack*. "Pray, stay with me until we hear."

Hours passed, and the sun glared haughtily down upon them, baking all those who waited, exposed, below it. Sweat pricked Caitlin's scalp beneath her palmetto hat and bloomed beneath her arms.

Prudence Periwinkle stood on the fringe of one cluster, clutching a bottle of smelling salts the way young mothers press babies to their chests. Horses swished their tails and pawed at the red dirt road, and the people choked on dust and suspense and fear.

No one spoke.

All eyes were on the arched door leading up to *Atlanta Daily Intelligencer* office, waiting. News from the West reported that Vicksburg had surrendered. The Confederacy lay cut in two. But every breath still hinged on the news that would come from a little town in the North called Gettysburg.

Minnie whispered prayers were for her father, while Caitlin's only thought was of Jack.

"There it is!" someone cried.

In the shadow of the door's alcove, someone reached out and fed a ream of papers to hungry hands. Finally, the casualty list had arrived.

The sheets of names passed through the crowd, sending up wails and moans from nearly all who touched them. When it was Minnie's

turn to read them, her hands shook so fiercely she thrust the pages into Caitlin's hand.

"Please," she whispered, eyes squeezed shut. "Thomas Taylor. Quickly, quickly, I can't bear another moment."

Caitlin scanned the tiny columns of names, the fresh ink now blurred and smudged. Hastily, she skipped to the T's.

And found the name.

"He is . . ."

Minnie's eyes popped open, and Caitlin labored to force out the words. "He was . . ." She shook her head. "He is at peace."

For a moment, Minnie sat in silence, as if frozen by the incomprehensible news. Then her face crumbled, yet she did not make a sound. It was as if agony had consumed her, stolen her very breath. Caitlin wrapped her arms around Minnie, and the grief of a father's daughter bled out onto her shoulder. Caitlin's face was wet with empathy.

Around them, grief thickened in the air, souring every breath. Caitlin tasted no victory in their despair.

In the edge of her vision, she saw a woman drop to her knees in the dusty road. Heart hammering on her ribs, Caitlin looked once more at the casualty list, slowing when she found the Ps.

Pelton, Pemberly, Pendleton, Periwinkle . . . Blood rushed in Caitlin's ears. *Periwinkle, Stuart.* Dr. Periwinkle's son. Prudence's precious nephew, the one she helped raise and love as a mother would have done. Gone. Prudence bowed down on the street, clawing fistfuls of dirt and letting them crumble over her silver hair.

The war would not come to Atlanta, they said. But from the fields of Pennsylvania, its long fingers wrapped around its throat with iron grip. The sons of the city had been slain. They had even been defeated.

The fissures in the House of Dixie were running deeper, yawning wider. How long would it be before it came crashing down, as the crack in Edgar Allen Poe's "House of Usher" had sent it rushing into the sea?

And if I am here when the Confederacy crumbles, will I be saved by the North? Or will I go down with the South?

Words from her nightmare reverberated in her spirit. *You are neither.*
Caught between two nations desperately at war, Caitlin McKae was on her own.

New York City
Sunday, July 5, 1863

“Jesus loves me—this I know, For the Bible tells me so.” Ruby O’Flannery rocked her one-year-old son and relished his warm weight on her lap. “Little ones to Him belong—They are weak, but He is strong.” She hummed the refrain and mused what a difference the truth of the song had made in her life, and in his. Before he was born, she had not wanted him, for reasons too painful to dwell upon. Now however, she could not imagine life without him. He had brought joy back into her life and laughter to her lips.

Aiden’s eyes drifted closed, and his dimpled hands loosened their grip on the zebras from his wooden Noah’s Ark set. Pressing a kiss to his pillowy cheek, Ruby laid him in his crib and gently brushed copper curls off his forehead.

“Sleep well, darlin,’” she whispered.

Ruby tiptoed out of the room and descended the wide walnut staircase of the Waverly brownstone just as a knock sounded on the front door. Caroline Waverly, her employer, was reading in the rear parlor, but no matter. This caller was for Ruby—the only caller she ever had.

She opened the door, a smile already on her lips, to see Edward Goodrich still in his Sunday best. He was not devilishly handsome—she wouldn’t trust him if he was, given her previous experience with that sort. But he was genuine. Kind. His coffee-colored eyes were deep and warm, not mischievous—and certainly not lustful, thank heaven.

“Is he down?” Edward looked past her to the stairway.

“You just missed him. You know, sometimes I wonder if you come here for our Bible studies or to play with my wee babe.” Tilting her head

in mock disapproval, her smile didn't fade. "Come in, come in."

Edward hung his hat on the hall stand, swiped a hand over his caramel-colored hair, and followed Ruby. She stopped in the kitchen to pour two glasses of lemonade before they went to the garden for their Sunday discussion. Ever since she had come to work for Caroline last year as the maid, she could not get enough of this beautiful space. Growing up as the daughter of a potato farmer in Ireland and as an immigrant living in New York City tenements for years, nature's beauty simply had not been part of her life, until now.

Shaded by a maple leaf canopy, Ruby and Edward sat at a wrought iron table flanked by hydrangea bushes drooping with white blooms. The rest of the garden was splattered with vibrant hues: yellow primroses, purple butterfly bushes, pink and red roses, and, hugging the tree trunks, green and white leafed hostas.

"Thank goodness for the shade," Edward said as he shrugged his shoulders out of his tan broadcloth suit jacket and tugged at the bowtie at his throat. Not a single breeze stirred the air. "Still, it beats the heat of Washington, doesn't it?"

"Aye." She sipped her lemonade, the glass already sweating in her hand. Ruby had first met Edward in Washington City the first year of the war. He was a hospital chaplain there, and she was there to be close to her husband in the Sixty-ninth New York regiment. She had lodged with Sanitary Commission nurse Charlotte Waverly, her employer's daughter, and Charlotte's sister Alice. Now Charlotte was co-director of a Rhode Island military hospital, and Edward—Ruby sighed as she looked at his lean, care-worn face. Edward's plans had been altered by news of his father's accident at the shipyard. He had stepped into a coil of rope, which tangled around his legs when the pulley yanked up. Not only did his legs break with the force, but when his body hit the block at the top, his arms, which had been raised to cover his head, broke too. Edward requested a transfer to New York so he could care for him at his home only a few blocks from the Waverly residence. Lucky for Ruby, he also helped her understand the Bible during Aiden's Sunday after-

noon naps. Ruby's faith was about as old as her toddling son, and though eager, it was not always sure-footed. She was grateful for Edward's guidance.

Edward laid his black leather Bible on the table and leaned back, stretching his long arms behind his head. "So, Ruby. What shall we talk about today?" She had insisted long ago that he dispense with calling her Mrs. O'Flannery. After all, she was just an Irish immigrant, a servant. His family employed people like her.

"I read about a Samaritan in the gospel of Luke chapter twenty-one."

"Ah. One of my favorite parables." He leaned forward on his elbows. "What do you think it means?"

"Well, the lesson seems to be that we should help people in need. But I stumble over the 'thees' and 'thous.'" She'd been working on matching training her Irish tongue more to American-English speech patterns like Mrs. Waverly's, but the poetic language of King James sometimes stumped her.

"It takes some getting used to. You've gleaned the main point, but let's dig a little deeper. The first two men who found a man stripped, robbed, and beaten on the road were Jewish religious men. They knew the right thing to do, but they didn't do it, because it wasn't convenient. The third man was a Samaritan. Do you know what that means?"

Ruby shook her head.

"Samaritans were despised by the Jews. But it was the Samaritan who loved his neighbor when the religious leaders chose not to. That should alarm us. See, we can be full of Bible knowledge, but if we don't love our neighbor, we still aren't pleasing Jesus."

"Who is our neighbor?"

Edward's smile broadened, and faint lines framed his eyes. "Anyone who God has brought into your life. Friends, family, Mrs. Waverly, but even those you meet at the market, or perhaps people you knew before you came to work here. Many times it isn't convenient to love your neighbor, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't."

Inwardly, Ruby shuddered. *I've spent this year trying to forget my past entirely. Am I really to go back and care for those in the tenements now?*

The French doors opened and Caroline rustled out into the garden with Dickens, Charlotte's cat, beside her. "I do apologize for interrupting." She sat on a stone bench opposite Ruby and Edward, her olive-colored day dress billowing from her waist. "But I've made up my mind. I'm going."

Ruby's eyes widened. "To Gettysburg?"

Edward's eyebrows arched. "What's this?"

"The fighting at Gettysburg. If the papers can be believed, it was by far the worst battle of the war to date." Dickens jumped into her lap. "The need is desperate and the resources few. Charlotte asked me to join her; she says I can be of use just by stirring a cauldron of stew. For once, I said yes." She paused, stroking Dickens's marmalade fur.

Aiden's fussing floated out the open second story window now, and Edward gathered the empty glasses from the table. "I'll get him, if it's all right with you."

It was. Edward's limp was barely perceptible as he ducked into the house.

Ruby turned back to Caroline. "What about her hospital in Rhode Island?"

"Olmsted insists he must have her field hospital experience on hand." Frederick Olmsted was the executive secretary of the Sanitary Commission. "Her co-director can manage without her for a time."

And I'll thank God I can stay right here. Where there was bloodshed, Charlotte was keen to go. But Ruby had seen enough of battlefields and army hospitals to suit her. She'd never forget the sea of wounded at White House Landing, Virginia, where she watched her own husband die right before her eyes just hours before Aiden was born.

Edward returned to the garden, carrying Aiden like a sack of flour and blowing kisses on his round belly. The baby giggled and squealed, squirming until his little feet stood on the soft grass. Stooping, Edward

let Aiden grasp his fingers while he practiced walking.

“She’ll be in New York tomorrow, and from there we’ll travel on together and stay as long as they need us. Olmsted is already there by now. So is Dr. Lansing.”

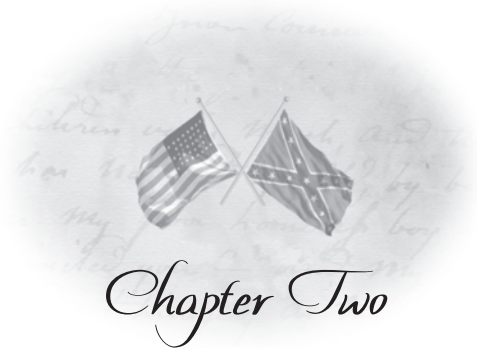
Ruby nodded. At least Charlotte would catch a glimpse of her fiancé, then.

“The women are going, and I am staying here.” He sighed. “Where there are men—especially wounded men—there should be chaplains.”

“I’m sure there are, dear. And the Christian Commission has sent delegates, too.” Caroline patted his shoulder. “The spiritual welfare of the entire Army of the Potomac is not up to you. The patients in New York’s hospitals are lucky to have you here, and so is your father. And so are we.” She glanced at Ruby, then back at him. “Edward, will you look in on Ruby and the baby while we’re gone? Between Sundays, too? I’m letting the cook have some time off so she can visit her family. I’d feel so much better leaving if I knew I could count on you.”

“Of course you can.” Aiden sat on his foot as Edward straightened and grinned at Ruby. “That’s what neighbors are for.”

“Aye.” Ruby nodded and chuckled. “Whether it’s convenient or not.”



Chapter Two

Atlanta, Georgia
Monday, July 11, 1863

*J*m sorry. If there was any other way . . .” The principal trailed off, mopped his brow with a kerchief.

“You’re closing the school?” Caitlin gripped the wooden bench that supported her. Sunlight bathed the Atlanta Female Institute’s chapel, and in the silence suspended between principal and his six staff, Caitlin heard echoes of the 140 girls who had begun and ended every day by singing here.

“They need the building for a hospital.”

Caitlin caught Minnie’s narrowed gaze, unspoken questions passing between them.

“And soon. The news from Gettysburg . . .” He shook his head before pinching the bridge of his nose. “And Vicksburg . . . as the hospital center of the South, we must prepare. They are taking our school. As I said, if there was anything I could do . . . but there isn’t.”

Caitlin clasped Minnie's hand and whispered, "What will you do?"

"What else can I do? I'm going home. Grandfather will be all alone now, and I'm sure he'll be grateful for the company." Minnie tucked her fingers in the pleats of her unevenly dyed black dress.

Caitlin's heart sank. "Home" for Minnie was a plantation in Tennessee, near Chattanooga. She would lose her job and her friend all at once.

"I'll see you back at Periwinkles," Minnie said. "I need to determine arrangements for the students I'd planned to teach over the summer break."

Nodding, Caitlin rose and exited the chapel's double doors.

"Miss McKae."

The deep voice, like the distant gallop of cavalry, could only belong to Noah Becker, the German immigrant lawyer who taught modern languages part-time. She need not slow her gait for him to reach her in three long strides.

"Yes?" Impatience edged her voice.

"Where can you be off to in such a hurry?" Sunlight shone on his tobacco-brown hair as he looked down at her, his hat in his hand.

"Nowhere."

"I'm headed that way, too. Share my carriage and you'll get there even faster." A grin softened the features of his angular face and teased a grudging smile from her lips. With a slight nod, she fixed her straw bonnet onto her hair, and he placed his hat back on his head. Together, they left the institute and found his tethered team.

"It is hard news." Mr. Becker said as he assisted her into the carriage. "Do you grieve for a loved one at Gettysburg or Vicksburg?"

Was it a test? "I grieve for all of them, of course." Silently, she breathed a prayer for Jack.

"Of course." Red dust lifted off the road as hoof beats plodded down Ellis Street. The closer they drew to downtown, the more Caitlin's nose pinched. Ever since the casualties from Gettysburg had twitched across the telegraph wires, the air had soured as women dipped their

dresses in pots of pungent black dye.

Mr. Becker sighed. "I don't know how to say this delicately."

"Speak your mind."

"Without an income, you will soon run out of money for boarding." Caitlin groped for a reason to contradict him. She found none. He continued. "I have a large house."

"How nice for you." Heat scorched her face as the wicked words slid out. She had not intended to be so discourteous.

Mr. Becker chuckled. "Come now, lass, hear me out."

She laughed at the slight German accent layered on the Irish word and bade him continue.

"You are not from here," he began, and her heart lurched. "Neither am I. I've lived here for years, but though I have adopted Georgia as my homeland, some days I'm not all together certain *it* has adopted *me*. I don't blend in—never could speak like them."

"Nor can I."

"So I noticed." He laughed again. "Your Irish accent sharpens when you're agitated. Otherwise, you just sound like a Northerner."

The honeysuckle cloying in the air suddenly lost its charm. "Say your piece, Mr. Becker."

He cleared his throat and turned the corner onto Peachtree Street. "I understand what it's like to be more of an outsider than an insider. To be on your own when most people have families—large ones—for built-in support."

"Are we going somewhere with this or is it more like our carriage ride?"

His steel blue eyes grew serious. "You need a place to live. And, as I said, I just so happen to have a house."

"I don't need your help, Mr. Becker."

"You miss the point entirely. I need you. I'm going to enlist. Live in my house while I'm gone." No flame of eagerness flared in Noah's countenance, no prediction of speedy victory passed his lips. A lump shifted in his throat. "Can you think of any reason why you should not? When

the war is over, the school will certainly reopen and you'll have your position back. But in the meantime . . .”

“It wouldn't be proper, I'm sure.”

“Nonsense. You wouldn't be alone. Bess does the cooking and cleaning, and her husband, Saul, cares for the property and horses.”

“Your slaves?” The words bolted from her before she could rein them in. Of course they were his slaves. She hazarded a glance at his countenance, wondering if her obvious feelings on the matter had condemned her already. Mr. Becker shifted the reins in his hands. “I hire them from their master in Decatur, about eight miles from here. They sleep in their own quarters above the kitchen and carriage house, and I pay them honest wages for their work. The percentage they pay back to their master is not up to me. As far as I'm concerned, they are merely servants . . .”

But not free. This time she bridled her tongue.

“Does that make me Simon Legree?”

Caitlin turned away from him at his reference to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. She'd be lying if she said the novel did not color her perspective.

Shoulders sagging, Noah dropped his voice to a whisper. “I operate under the law, even if I don't agree with it.” Faint lines fanned from his eyes, and Caitlin wondered just exactly what his opinion was. But, “The ‘peculiar institution’ is not the debate I intended to have right now. Please.” His tone tugged at Caitlin. “Will you come?”

Make your own way. Depend on no man. Her mother's voice rattled in her spirit. “I thank you for your offer, Mr. Becker. But I will find a way to weather this storm without relying on your charity.”

He nodded, jaw set. “Shall we simply enjoy the fresh air and continue the ride then?”

Caitlin agreed, and settled back into the seat, swatting a trio of flies away from her face.

The clanging rhythm of wartime factories signaled their approach to the clogged center of town. The carriage lurched haltingly along the road, navigating between cabs, wagons, omnibuses, and the steaming

calling cards horse-drawn conveyances inevitably dropped behind. Four railroad lines converged in Atlanta, and the citizens never forgot it. Day and night, iron horses belched and screeched. Every departure carried away railroad supplies, saddles, shoes, percussion caps, rifles, ammunition, swords, and more. Every arrival brought more wounded and refugees. Atlanta nearly choked on the business of war.

Caitlin did not care for downtown Atlanta. The inherent odors of a population outgrowing its sanitation system were not new to Caitlin. What New York didn't have, however, was Confederate soldiers stationed along the dusty streets, doffing their caps to her as she rode by. Had she battled with their brothers? Would they raise their guns against her even now? She dropped her gaze to her calico-covered lap.

"Here we are." Mr. Becker drew rein and the carriage stopped.

Caitlin looked around, confusion grooving her brow. "But why?" They were near the railroad tracks, surrounded by boxcars. Grimy children played in the dirt and women hollered at them from the shadows. Some of the refugees had brought pets or pianofortes with them. Most had trunks and cookware. All of them looked hungry.

"Welcome home." He was not smiling. "Without a residence, this will be your only realistic option."

No. "I'm staying at Miss Periwinkle's boarding house—"

"How long can you stay without an income? She might let you stay for free because she's so fond of you, but you'd be taking money from her by taking the place of a paying customer. Would you do that to her after she already looked after you all last summer during your convalescence?"

Caitlin's throat went dry. Without Prudy and Dr. Periwinkle, she would have withered away long ago, in spirit as well as body. Taking money from Prudence was no way to return the favor. And if Periwinkle Place was not an option, neither was the Trout House, Atlanta Hotel, or any of the other lodgings that carried no affection toward Caitlin.

"Take a good look, Miss McKae. Do you want to join them in the boxcars? You'd have to share the space with four other families, but at

least you'd have a roof over your head. They say you get used to the smell."

She glared at him. Everything in her being revolted at this place. The filth of living without proper water closets, the deafening shriek of the never-ending trains, the aimless purgatorylike existence. How quickly the tide of her life could turn on her!

Mr. Becker grasped her trembling hands in his. "Come away with me, Miss McKae. This is no place for you."

Maybe it was, though. After all she had done, maybe this was exactly the place for the likes of her.

A train wailed and the earth rumbled with rolling freight as Mr. Becker's large hands tightened over hers. *Why would God put a lifeline in my hands if He did not intend for me to use it?* He had shown her the way out before. Perhaps He was doing so again. But to be indebted to a man grated on her no end.

"It is not charity." Mr. Becker said, as though he could read her mind. "It is business."

Noah's palms grew damp on the leather reins as they rode past city hall and turned right on McDonough Street. Oak trees dappled the road with shadow while pink and red blossoms sizzled across crape myrtle branches. Soon they would be home. The thought of having a woman in his house again should not set his nerves on edge this way. This was nothing like the last time, so many years ago. Entirely different circumstances.

Entirely different women. He slid a glance toward Miss McKae, but saw only the tip of her nose poking out from the bonnet that shielded her. Not that he needed to see her face to remember her molasses eyes, the faint spray of freckles—and the thin scar lining her jaw on the left side. The little spitfire had a story to tell, that much was certain. Whether he would ever hear it, however, remained to be seen.

"I would ask something of you while you're here. I would ask you

to teach a little girl. Just one child, seven years of age.”

Caitlin blinked. “Only one pupil? Is that all?”

His full lips flattened for a moment. “Not quite all. I would ask that you care for her as your personal charge.”

Caitlin tilted her head, squinting at him, and he feared she would say no. His heart dipped. No other woman would be right for the job. Her students not only loved her, they learned from her. What’s more, she made them *want* to learn. And yet she did not coddle them like their mummies had. She taught personal responsibility as well as any subject in the curriculum. It was what set her apart.

As they drew near to his home, she finally spoke. “Who is she?”

“Papa!” The door on his white, black-shuttered plantation plain home slammed shut behind Analiese. She flew out onto the columned porch, braids streaming out behind her. Rascal, his coonhound, loped in her wake, his tail wagging his rear end. “You’re home!”

Noah slowed the carriage to a halt in the boxwood-lined drive, and when Ana came close enough, he swung her up onto his lap before reaching down to scratch Rascal behind the ears. Ana’s forget-me-not-blue eyes sparkled as she wiggled down between him and Caitlin on the bench.

“Yes, Dear Heart, and I’ve brought a friend. Analiese, this is Miss Caitlin McKae. Miss McKae, this is Analiese. My daughter.”

Caitlin’s gaze flashed over his bare ring finger, but mercifully, she did not ask for an explanation.

“Pleased to meet you. I am seven years old and I am missing two things. Can you guess what they are?” Ana grinned broadly.

“Let me see now.” Caitlin tapped her finger to her chin.

“I’ll give you a hint. It rhymes with ‘beeth’!”

“Oh!” Caitlin threw her hands in the air. “Then it *must* be . . . a wreath!”

“No . . .” Ana shook her head.

“No? How about a sheath?”

Ana giggled.

“Not a sheath, then. Hmmm. What else rhymes with beeth ... Meeth? Seeth? Leeth? Why, do you know, Analiese, that I am missing all of those things myself? I have no idea what they even are!”

Laughter bubbled out of Ana as she rocked back against Noah. “Teeth! Teeth! See?”

Caitlin’s eyes widened as she studied the gap-toothed smile. “I do see! One smile minus two teeth. Now if only you were missing an eye as well, you could wear a patch and look just like a pirate.”

Ana squeezed one eye shut and grimaced. “Like the pirates in *Robinson Crusoe*? Like this?”

Caitlin’s eyebrows lifted. She raised her eyes to meet Noah’s gaze and said: “Yes.” Her smile hitched in his throat. She had given him her answer.

He planted a kiss on Ana’s pecan-colored hair and without turning to face him, she patted his knee while prattling on to Caitlin. She smelled of sunshine and magnolia petals and innocence. She was the best part of his life.

And he was leaving her.



Chapter Three

New York City
Monday, July 13, 1863

The city seemed far away as Aiden pointed happily at the fluffy sheep grazing in Central Park. Ruby smiled and let him stumble ahead of her. Green grass was far more merciful to a wee lad's knees than were the cobblestones and sidewalks in their own neighborhood. *And not a lamp post in sight.* For if there were, Aiden would certainly careen right into it.

She watched him for a signal that he had run off enough energy to justify going home. The sun had licked the dew from the ground already, and Aiden's curls were beginning to cling to the nape of his neck.

Her mind wandered to the work awaiting her at the brownstone. She needed to iron the apple-green promenade gown she'd just finished sewing for Mrs. Kurtz before she arrived later today to pick it up. *And with four flounces on the skirt, it will take some doing.* Ruby had to make

sure the gown was absolutely perfect. Mrs. Kurtz had four daughters, all of whom appreciated well-made clothing. If she could please Mrs. Kurtz, more business was sure to follow.

Before becoming a domestic, Ruby had been a needlewoman who sewed shirtsleeves for Davis & Company. Since working for Caroline Waverly, however, she had tried her hand at sewing complete custom gowns when her domestic duties were complete. Her first gown, created for Caroline, had been a remarkable imitation of a fashion plate in *Godey's Lady's Book*, which quickly generated orders from several of Caroline's friends. This week, with her employer gone to Gettysburg, perhaps Ruby could finish at least two of them. The more she could store up for Aiden's education, the better. He would be the first in her family to have any, cost her what it may. She was no stranger to sacrifice.

"Almost time to go, Aiden. Can you say goodbye to the sheep? What does a sheep say?"

"Moo!"

"Close."

Ruby turned her head toward the voice and smiled to see Edward driving his horse and buggy toward them, his hair at odds with the breeze that rifled through it.

"I didn't expect to see you here!" Ruby bent to hold Aiden's hand as Edward climbed down from the buggy. And she certainly never expected to see him in public without his hat. "Is something the matter?"

He shielded his eyes from the sun with his hand and scanned the park. "Not that I can see."

Ruby's lips quirked up. "Tell that to your neck." Dark pink blotches had bloomed on his fair skin.

Edward's hand flew to his throat for a moment, then dropped in apparent resignation. "It is not my most fetching characteristic, granted." He shook his head. "How much better would it be if, occasionally, I grew large biceps instead of large splotches the very color of peonies?" Edward curled a fist over his shoulder and frowned.

Ruby hid her laughter behind her hand, but the gleam in his eyes

told her it was exactly the response he wanted. Though he was a learned man, and far above her social class, he always set her at ease.

“Up, up!” Aiden pulled on her skirts.

Edward knelt down beside him, plucked a white-blossomed wildflower from the grass and placed it in the boy’s chubby hand. “Now, give that to your mother,” he whispered, and scooped Aiden up, propping him on his hip. Aiden held out the tiny flower, and Ruby took it.

“Thank you.” Ruby smiled, knowing full well the poor thing would be wilted beyond redemption by the time they arrived home.

“His idea. Headed home?”

“Aye.”

“Good. Keep the omnibus fare, I’ll take you myself.”

“But you just arrived! Didn’t you?”

“I’ve seen enough. Come, there is room on the bench for all of us. But I’ll need this one to help me drive.” Edward bounced Aiden on his hip and the baby gurgled with delight.

Once seated on the plush leather bench with Aiden settled on Edward’s lap, Ruby drank in the scent of freshly mown grass. Birdsong flitted through the air as the buggy wound its way through The Green and The Playground, around The Pond and along the wooded Promontory until exiting through the southeast Scholar’s Gate. It was not a leisurely pace.

“Thank you, Aiden. Now, back to your mama.” Ruby guided Aiden’s chubby legs over to her own lap and noticed Edward’s smile was tight. He drove Justus a little faster than usual, and his gaze constantly roved the periphery.

“Are you worried about your father being home alone?” she tried.

“Hm? Oh. No, Schaefer is capable.” Ah yes. Ruby had forgotten Edward shared the nursing duties with his father’s manservant.

Suddenly, his jaw set as he stared straight ahead. Then she heard it, too.

“Fighting? On Fifth Avenue?” Ruby looked around, bewildered. She’d grown used to these scenes along the Bowery and in Five Points. But

in midtown Manhattan? She clutched Aiden closer. “What’s happening?”

“I was afraid of this. Hang on.” He snapped the reins above Justus, and the buggy lurched over a broken cobblestone. “I think it’s coming from a few blocks east of here, at the provost marshal’s office. Just need to get past it and get you home.”

“What? Please tell me, what’s going on?”

Edward flattened his lips. “Lincoln’s draft. They’ve drawn names, you see, to force men to refill the Union’s dwindling ranks. They were in the papers over the weekend. Many of those selected come from working-class families. Many of them are Irish. They can’t afford to pay the three hundred dollars it would take to buy their way out.”

“Oh no.”

Edward nodded. “That’s what they thought. But that’s not the end of it.” He sighed. “Black men are exempt.” He glanced at her. “They can volunteer in colored regiments, but they won’t be drafted.”

Dread knotted in Ruby’s chest. The tensions between her people and the free blacks had been simmering for years. Free blacks complained that Irish immigrants were replacing them in the service trades—domestic servants, dock and railroad laborers, and more. The Irish felt themselves to be considered lower in the social strata than former slaves and clamored to climb over them. If blacks were exempt from the military draft and Irishmen were sent away, the jobs would go to the black community.

“They will want blood for this.” Aiden squirmed in her lap but she held him firm. Pushing down the rising swell of fear, however, proved to be far more difficult.

“I pray not. But I fear it’s likely.”

Edward strained to see what was happening up ahead. *Lord, help us. Protect them. Show me the way.* Wasn’t that always his recurring prayer? War had taught him was that God didn’t always show him the way *around* trials. Sometimes, He showed him the way *through* them.

Justus whinnied and twitched his mane as the phaeton approached a crowded intersection. *Too crowded.* “All right, boy, let’s find another way.” But just as Edward began to wheel the buggy around, a tide of men came rushing up from the cross street behind them. They were the men who kept the city going. Brawny men, corded with muscles and streaked with grime. They had poured their sweat into the railroads, machine shops, shipyards, and iron foundries. Their women had come with them, tattered and twitching, with crowbars and glass bottles for hands. The Black Joke Fire Engine Company No. 33 was here too, in full regalia, blistering, no doubt, that their traditional exemption had been revoked, as well.

Years of anger and frustration that had been banked up against the privileged class now blazed forth. A sooty-faced man broke a cobblestone from the road and hurled it over Edward’s carriage and into a blurry group of policeman. Justus skittered sideways. Another cobblestone sailed overhead, and another, each one drawing shouts and screams from both sides.

Without a sound, Ruby shoved Aiden to the floor between her feet and trapped him beneath her knees. She lunged forward and clutched the dash rail with a knuckle-white grip, covering her son’s body with her own.

“Steady,” Edward said. But the horse was not steady. He was young. *And frightened out of his wits.* Backwards, forward, sideways Justus stepped. Rioters and police seethed and clashed. Crowbars, clubs, fence posts, paving stones all sought their prey with primal rage. *God! All is madness! This is not a battlefield, it is 5th Avenue, New York City!* Justus reared and the carriage teetered on its left wheels before staggering back into place.

“Whoa, Justus!” Edward pulled hard on the reins, but Justus was beyond calming. Eyes wild, he reared again and pawed at the air, twisted frantically in his harness.

“Jump, Ruby!” She straightened, and Edward snatched Aiden from the floorboard. He grabbed Ruby’s elbow and jerked her to her feet.

“Now!” With Aiden digging his fingers into Edward’s throat, Edward boosted her out of the phaeton and leapt to the ground after her, right as Justus came crashing down to the pavement on his side.

Aiden’s cheeks were wet on Edward’s neck. “Get back! Steer clear of the horse!” He handed the baby to Ruby, and in the next instant, Edward was on the ground, unhitching the buggy’s harness from the stunned horse. If Justus rioted like the rabid crowd around him, the phaeton would be a dangerous weapon, capable of injuring both Justus and anyone in his path.

“Steady, boy, steady.” Edward stroked the horse’s neck and grabbed the reins below his bridle.

“There’s a three hundred dollar man!” The voice sounded far away, until a strap of leather tore across his flesh. “Down with rich men! Can’t buy yer way out o’ this!”

Stunned, Edward stumbled before whirling around to face his attacker. *A soft answer turneth away wrath.* “Friend, you have reason to be upset, yet I have no quarrel with you. I would never buy a substitute, I serve myself as—”

“How does it feel to be beaten down, laddie?” The belt sliced through the air again and raked through his side, stealing the air from his lungs as fire spiked through his core. “Never mind, don’t tell me. I already know.”

Justus jerked the reins out of Edward’s hands and bolted.

Another man sneered, a club clenched in his fist. All around them, people were shouting, screaming, kicking, pulling, shoving, punching. The jagged edge of a broken cobblestone came down on the back of Edward’s head. He dropped to his knees, waited for the world to stop spinning and for his breakfast to settle back down in his stomach.

“Edward!” Ruby screamed from the edge of his vision. He pushed himself back up and turned to her. Strands of red hair whipped about her flashing green eyes. Her dress was striped with axle grease.

“Got yerself a little wench, too, I see. Only she looks a mite better fed than mine, that’s what.”

Ruby flinched as the slur landed upon her like a handful of dung. But it put steel in Edward's spine. He thrust himself between her and Aiden and the angry men.

"Leave them alone now, gentlemen." Surprising, how steady one's voice could be when one was in such pain.

They howled with whiskey-scented laughter. "Gentlemen! How do ye like that? Well, *kind sir*, I'll tell ye what. It makes no difference to me who's under my belt so long as I get a sound thrashing in. Ye'll take her share, then, will ye?"

"Gladly." If the Shepherd King David could slay lions and bears for the sake of his sheep, surely Edward Goodrich should be able to stand a leather belt for two in his keeping. After all, it was only last September he'd taken a bullet meant for his friend Dr. Caleb Lansing, his lingering limp a daily reminder. It seemed he had quite a knack for getting in the way.

"Edward!" Ruby shouted again and stepped closer, holding Aiden tight. "Patrick, Seamus, Kevin!" Edward feared she had gone mad. "Aye, I know you lads, and more's the pity! Shame on you! You are threatening an innocent man, a chaplain with the army! He has served his time and still serves the wounded right here in New York's hospitals!" Her voice strengthened with every syllable, and her Irish accent sharpened, puncturing through the din of men grumbling into their beards. "I'm one of you, I am, we come from the same land! And I have scratched out a living with my belly clawing for food, same as anyone here, that's what. I'm sorry about the draft, lads, really I am, but if you beat this man for the wrongs of another, then—then God have mercy on your souls, for the law won't, that's what!"

A crowbar clattered to the ground, and Ruby turned to face a bright-cheeked woman in a threadbare purple gown, holding her hands out to Ruby, palms up, as though begging for alms.

"Ruby?"

Ruby squinted toward the voice.

"Bedad! It's Ruby Shannon O'Flannery!" Black hair falling into her eyes, she turned to the men. "Get out of here, you're fightin' your own,

you are! It's Ruby, don't you remember? Shoo!" The woman swung her broken bottle in a wide arc around her. "Her Matthew fought with Sean and the lads in the 69th straight off! Died in Virginia, he did! You'll do as she says! Ruby, darlin', you're home at last! I thought I'd never see you again, that's what. Look at you now! My, how time has been kind to you." Tears glazed wobbly paths down her cheeks and gathered beneath her trembling chin.

Ruby gasped, and Edward strained his ears to hear her whisper: "Emma!" She shifted Aiden's weight to her other hip and patted his back as his little shoulders heaved with sobs.

"Oh!" Emma clapped her hands over her heart. "Such a bonnie wee lad, Ruby!"

Emma reached for Ruby, and with but a moment's hesitation, she took Emma's grimy hand. The women embraced, Aiden sandwiched between them, until at length, Ruby pulled back.

Edward cleared his throat. "And to whom do I owe my surprising rescue?" The ache in his back and ribs intensified as the crowd ebbed away, and he struggled to keep it from showing in his face.

Emma snorted. "Go on, now. 'Twas Ruby making the lads think twice with her own speech first."

"Well. I am Edward Goodrich." He reached out and shook her hand, noting with some alarm that her nails were painted even brighter than her face.

"This is Emma Connors," Ruby offered. "My neighbor."

New York City
Wednesday, July 15, 1863

"How bad is it?" Ruby swung wide the door and let Edward push through it, his shoulders sagging with the knowledge of good and evil.

"Apocalyptic." Shadows clung beneath his red-rimmed eyes. "Very, very bad."

“Come sit down. Eat.”

Edward followed her into the dining room and eased himself into a chair. Ruby tossed a colander to Aiden, who happily practiced sitting in it and getting out again while she scurried into the kitchen to scoop biscuits and stew into a bowl for her chaplain friend.

“Eat first, then tell me.” She set the steaming dish in front of him, fully aware they were steaming just fine without it. All windows and doors had been locked shut ever since Monday.

He bowed his head in silence, then began his dinner. When he closed his eyes and sighed with the first forkful of roast beef, she realized he probably had not eaten a decent meal since their harrowing escape on Monday morning. A policeman had caught Justus by the reins before he had left the block, and once the crowds had dispersed, they were able to take him and the carriage home after all. Emma begged to see Ruby again, and Ruby had agreed. *Later*, they had agreed, as Emma picked up her crowbar.

Mrs. Kurtz had not come on Monday for her gown, nor did she come yesterday or today. The rioters had broadened their targets to include not just policemen and draft officers, but Republicans, the wealthy, and blacks. People had died. Perhaps they were dying still.

Ruby sat quietly as Edward ate. His eyelids drooping, he sipped his black coffee before leaning on his elbows and looking her square in the eyes. Ruby detected no warmth in them now, only the darkness he had seen here, in their own city. “I don’t know where to begin.”

“With your father.” Ruby squeezed her hands together in her lap. “How is he?”

“Fine, thank you.” He paused, spinning the saltshaker around on the table. “Some mansions on Fifth Avenue have been looted and burned, and some homes just a few blocks from here were destroyed, too. They cut the telegraph lines. Sacked Brooks Brothers for its profiteering with uniforms made from shoddy. Thousands of rioters broke into the armory, took carbines—rifles—and then burned the building down even though ten rioters were still inside.”

“Did they escape?”

“No.” Folding his hands in his lap, Edward pressed his lips together for a long moment before continuing. “They have made barricades in the streets. I believe they are truly at war. With New York. Including its children.” He shook his head. “They burned down the Colored Orphans Asylum, Ruby.” His voice wavered.

Nausea rolled Ruby’s stomach as she cast a blurry glance at Aiden. Were her countrymen really so vile? “What happened?” she whispered.

“Thank God they all escaped alive and by the guidance of an Irishman, word has it. Paddy McCafferty? Do you know him?”

Ruby shook her head, although she wished she knew this heroic Paddy rather than the rioters she had called by name on Monday.

“Well, the boys and girls are safe, but they’ll need a different home. Actually, I fear most of the city’s black residents will be looking for another home if they aren’t safe in the arms of Jesus by now.”

Ruby sucked in a breath. “What?”

“Have you not read the newspaper?”

“Only the headlines. I’d rather hear it from you.” She pinned him with her gaze and watched the struggle behind his eyes. Was she selfish for asking him to repeat what he had seen?

“Whatever violence you can imagine an Irishman doing to a free-man, it has been done.”

She blinked. “I can imagine quite a lot.” *Destroying their property. Beating them. Mutilating them. Drowning them. Shooting. Lynching.*

“It has been done.” He spun the saltshaker still, with trembling hand. “Many times over.”

The words cost him, she could tell. Edward fell into silence then, and Ruby did not pull him out. She only sat at his elbow, watching Aiden roll around on the rug, his bottom wedged in the colander, and wondered how long her son would believe the world was a beautiful place that existed to make him happy. She wondered what he would do when he discovered it did not. Would he reach for the bottle? Or a gun? Or a noose? Did his Irish blood condemn him to a life of violence? *No*,

please God. She would raise him different than that. Besides, he was only half-Irish. At least, as far as she knew.

Edward leaned back in his chair and winced, snapping Ruby from her reverie.

“Has anyone treated your wounds yet?”

He grimaced as he leaned away from the rungs of the chair. “You mean there is something that can help these stripes feel better?”

“Aye,” she said. “Comfrey leaves boiled into a tea should help.” She had used them countless times to soothe Aiden’s cuts and scratches. “You just soak linen strips or towels in the tea and place them on the wounds.”

“Can you help me?”

Her heart skipped a beat. What had she done? She couldn’t help him, she couldn’t touch a man, not even this man, not *any* man, not after—her eyes squeezed shut against the sneering face that surged before her. She could almost smell his pomade and whiskey. Ruby shook her head, trying to loosen memory’s tentacles from her spirit.

“It’s just that—I don’t have any comfy tea. Can you make it for me?”

“Comfrey.”

“Comfrey sounds comfy to me.” The corner of his mouth tipped up.

“All right. I’ll go make it. It will take a few minutes.”

By the time Ruby returned carrying a tray of tea-soaked linens, Edward had fallen asleep lying on his stomach on the rug in the rear parlor, Dickens curled next to him. Kneeling down beside him, she could not bring herself to rouse him from his slumber. It was what he needed most of all.

She looked at the towels, already cooling. They really should be applied when quite warm to do the most good. *Come now lassie, you can do better than this. It is only Edward. You are a widow, not a maiden.*

Gingerly, Ruby tugged up his shirttail to expose the tracks the belt had left on his back. The damage may not have been so great save for the brass buckle digging its tooth into his skin before tearing through it.

She cringed at the sight. No, she was not cut out to be a nurse like Charlotte, or to visit the wounded in hospitals nearly every day like Edward did. But God help her, she should be able to lay comfrey-soaked strips on top of these scabbed over gulleys through his flesh. Really, she didn't even have to touch him.

Ruby spread the cloths over the inflamed stripes and sat back on her heels. It was a victory, and she thanked God for it.

Aiden toddled over, tin colander in his chubby hand, and Ruby scooped him up before he could climb on Edward or pull the cat's tail. "Come, darlin'." She kissed Aiden's temple as she peeled his little fingers off the handle. "It's time we get you to bed for the night."

Ka-boom! Ka-boom! Ka-boom!

Edward jerked awake and stumbled to his feet, wet towels peeling from his back as he did so. His heart hammered against his ribs as comprehension knifed through his drowsiness. New York's troops had come back from Gettysburg.

Ka-boom!

And were firing cannons at the rioters.

Quickly, he swiped up the towels that had fallen to the carpet and dropped them on the tray at his feet, then rushed to the bottom of the stairway.

"Ruby!" he called up. "I've got to go now. Lock the door behind me!"

Edward slammed the door shut after himself and bounded down the steps. The twilight sky was stained a dirty orange, and thick with the smell of turpentine, a choking reminder of the buildings the rioters had torched. The black community downtown had fared the worst, by far, as had the restaurants, saloons, and brothels who had served them. Sidewalk bonfires consumed furniture in these neighborhoods, and kept the skies glowing even after the sun had set. The waterfront had all but emptied of dark-skinned New Yorkers.

But it was the cannons that concerned Edward now. They seemed close, only blocks away. He jogged on Sixteenth St. east toward the sound, through Union Square Park, past Lexington Ave., and Third Ave.—and stopped.

Bronze, short-barreled howitzer cannons gleamed as they spewed grapeshot into the barricades erected at First Avenue. Clouds of gun-smoke belched from their mouths, and the taste of saltpeter sat bitterly on Edward's tongue. The earth shuddered, reverberating in his chest.

The rioters engaged desperately. When a chink was punched through the barricade, bricks came hurling out of the open windows of the tenement behind it. Then came the sniper fire. Soldiers who had survived the battle of Gettysburg and then a hard march back up north were being felled by their own neighbors.

“Fix bayonets!” The order jolted through Edward's middle like lightning. *Bayonets?* “Charge!”

“No wait!” But Edward's voice was lost in the cacophony of the charge. Did they understand that the building surely held more than just the snipers and stone throwers? That women and children could be huddled in the corners? Visions of the Irishwomen he'd seen on the streets since Monday flitted through his mind then. Women, in fact, had been the ones who crowbarred up the tracks of the Fourth Ave. commuter rail line above 42nd St. They had beaten policemen until they were unrecognizable.

But of course, those women did not represent the whole. There had to be more like Ruby O'Flannery among the Irish women. They just weren't the type to be seen.

They were the type to hide and pray for it all to pass on by.

“Wait!” Edward cried out again, and pushed through the gap in the barricade and into the bowels of the tenement building. He ran into room after room, listening, looking. Until finally, he heard it.

“I mean you no harm!” It was not an Irish accent. Perhaps the reason she had been spared the soldiers' steel blade.

“I am coming, just a moment!”

Edward found her then, exactly as he had imagined her. Small, unthreatening, yet threatened.

“Thanks be to God!” they both said at once.

“Can you walk?” Edward helped her to her feet.

“I believe I twisted my ankle.”

“Here, let me help you.” He wrapped his arm around her waist and ushered her outside. She was so very thin, her weight was nothing for him to support. She was draped in rags, but her hair was pulled neatly into a bun.

“Are you hurt elsewhere? Other than your ankle?” He eased her down onto a barrel while the firefight continued inside the building.

She stared at his face, eyes growing wide. Her bony hand fluttered to her heart. “George?” she whispered. “It’s me, Vivian! You have found me!”

“No, I’m sorry, dear woman, you must be mistaken. My name is—”

“Of course, of course! It has been so long you see, and you look so much like your father. You are Edward.” Tears glossed her eyes. “My, how you’ve grown!”

Edward cocked his head and studied her.

“Edward Goodrich. My nephew.” She clasped his hand in both of hers. “I never thought I’d see you again. You look just like your father did at your age. Oh! I can scarcely believe he sent you for me, after all this time!”

But Edward had not seen this woman, ever. His father was an only child, like Edward. At least, that’s what he’d always said.

A few more soldiers jogged up to the tenement, one of them shouting above the rest. As they drew closer, the shouting became louder, more frantic.

“That’s my building! That’s my home! Hey! My mother’s in there!”

Vivian whipped her head toward the shouting, eyes blazing. She stood on her good foot.

“Jack?”

The soldier froze.

Vivian shouted again, waving her arms. “Jack! Jack! Over here!”

Edward stepped back and Jack ran to her, engulfing her thin frame in his arms, and she wept onto his dusty blue frock coat. “I can’t believe you’re here! My son, my son, oh thank you God, my son is home!”

She pulled back and removed his kepi, brushed his saddle brown hair to the side. “It’s you,” she whispered. “Look at you. Nineteen years old now, and taller, too.”

“And Caitlin? Is she here?” Jack looked over his mother’s head, scanning the faces around them.

Her smile wilting, two lines appeared between her eyes as she shook her head. “She’d been sending me money for months—never put a note with it, and never a return address, but I recognize her handwriting on the envelope. It’s just the sort of thing she would do, too. Then all of a sudden, the money stopped coming. That was more than a year ago.”

Jack dropped his chin to his chest and scuffed the dirt with his brogans. “I thought she’d made it home before me.”

“From where?” The words leapt from Vivian’s throat as her bony fingers clutched his biceps. “Jack, do you know where has your sister been?”

“She was with me.” The boy’s voice quivered. “But I—I lost her. She’s missing in action.” He winced at his mother’s strangled gasp. “But she might be all right. If Caitlin is alive somewhere—anywhere at all—she will survive.”

Eyes squeezed shut for a moment, Vivian’s lips trembled even as she nodded. Whatever she whispered in her son’s ear as she embraced him once more, Edward could not hear.

“Come,” Edward said as soon as Vivian released Jack’s neck. “You need food, and rest.” Clearly, she needed more than that. But at least, it was a start.