

SPY *of*
RICHMOND

Heroines Behind the Lines

CIVIL WAR

Book 4

SPY *of*
RICHMOND

JOCELYN GREEN

MOODY PUBLISHERS
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JOCELYN GREEN

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A Note on the City of Richmond

Virginia was the cradle of democracy. Not only could it claim the settlement of Jamestown, but the leaders the state produced—George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, and James Madison—guided the new nation through its earliest perils.

So when the Southern states seceded from the country Virginia helped birth, the Old Dominion hesitated. In fact, as late as April 12, 1861, Richmond was a Union town. The diverse, urban area had little in common with the agrarian sector of the Cotton South. But the action at Fort Sumter, South Carolina, changed everything. When Lincoln called for his 75,000 volunteers, Richmond and Virginia felt the choice was made for them. In the face of an invading army, Virginia was the last state to secede. Weeks later, the Confederate capital moved to Richmond. The city of 38,000 would balloon to more than 100,000 souls. It seethed with government officials, refugees, speculators, prisoners, soldiers, criminals, and wounded. No other American city endured what Richmond did during this war: four years of periodic

attack, frequent raids, siege, famine, capitulation, and partial destruction by fire.

Those who remained loyal to the Union—and to the cause of freedom, especially after Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation—stood to lose the most in this feverishly patriotic capital. The Richmond Underground comprised native Virginians as well as immigrants, white and black, slave and free, men and women. Their beliefs and actions placed their property, liberty, and lives at risk. *Spy of Richmond* tells a tale of commitment to conviction no matter the cost.



Prologue

Outside Savannah, Georgia
Thursday, March 3, 1859

I *t is madness.*

Rain hissing to the earth in torrents behind her, Sophie Kent shivered and craned her neck toward the platform, half expecting lightning to strike the Ten Broeck Race Course any moment. It was the second day of the auction selling more than 420 slaves, and the second day of boiling, weeping storms. Gripping her pencil and papers beneath the folds of her wrap, Sophie trained her eyes and ears to the drama around her.

Humiliation tightened her throat as she watched a woman on the stage made to jump, bend, twist, and turn. Her smooth complexion was the color of tea with milk and honey, a bright contrast to the cocoa and coffee bean shades of the others. Her almond-shaped eyes were cast downward as a man tugged off her shawl and head rag before pinching her arm and pulling her lips apart to display her teeth. Modesty told Sophie to avert her gaze from the indignity, but she resisted. For years,

she'd been blind to the horrors of slavery. This time, she would not look away. *Neither will I stay silent. Not any longer.*

The man spun the woman around and made some remark into her ear; she let him expose her back to the audience. "No scars from the disciplining lash—no trace of rebellion in her spirit," he said. The woman covered herself once more.

As the bidding began from within the two hundred buyers in attendance, Sophie withdrew her auction catalogue from her wrap, her pencil poised to take notes. Humidity curled the pages, and the list of souls for sale drooped in her gloved hand.

116—Rina, 18; rice, prime woman.

117—Lena, 1.

118—Pompey, 31; rice—lame in one foot.

256—Daphne, 32; house servant.

257—Judy, aged; rice hand.

342—Cassander, 35; cotton hand—has fits.

Murmuring voices pricked Sophie's ears. "Well, Smith, I saw you inspecting this chattel yesterday. Going to buy her?"

"I think not. No. 256 looks healthy enough, and can do a heap of work. But it's been years since she had any children, she told me. Done breeding, I reckon."

Heat scorched Sophie's cheeks as she furiously recorded the exchange in the margin of her catalogue. *Do they not hear themselves? Do they not understand these are people not livestock?*

In front of her, rough-looking young men with knives in their belts and tobacco in their cheeks spoke of managing refractory slaves. Joining them were white-haired gentlemen with silk cloths at their necks. These advocates of severe whipping and branding were silenced by a booming voice: "I'm a driver, myself, and I've had some experience, and I ought to know. You can manage ordinary slaves by lickin'em, and givin'em a taste of the hot iron once in a while when they're extra ugly;

but if a brute really sets himself up against me, I can't never have any patience with him. I just get my pistol and shoot him right down, and that's the best way."

Sophie looked up to see more than one man nod in agreement.

"Sold!" The gavel struck, and Daphne, chattel no. 256, twisted her bright yellow head scarf back into place over her hair. Her face settled into tense lines as a family of four replaced her on the platform.

Thunder snarled, and wind wailed through the pines surrounding the race course. The crowd shifted closer to the platform, away from the spitting rain. All except for Sophie, who remained rooted in place.

"Pardon me, Miss." A man in gold-rimmed spectacles tipped his broad-brimmed hat to her. "Tedious doings, eh?"

"I can think of another word for it," she muttered without looking up from her catalogue, waiting for him to pass.

He didn't. "Sophie?"

She turned in time to see lightning's flash brighten his twinkling brown eyes. "I thought you were in—" *New York*.

But the sharpness of his gaze penetrated her surprise (or: bewilderment). Harrison Caldwell was here for the same reason she was, which was why he wore spectacles he didn't need, and a mustache too full to be his own.

"Shhhhh," he said beneath his breath. "You can do this. Write it." He bent, kissed her hand, and whispered, "Four years to go," then stood tall and stepped away from her, his eyes focused on the platform.

Heart hammering, Sophie clenched her papers, careless of the ink and lead smearing her gloves. Aware that he would disappear into the crowd any moment, she stared at his broad back while she could. Memories kindled until her face burned.

A hand squeezed her shoulder, and she nearly jumped out of her kid leather boots.

"Daddy!" Sophie gasped. "You startled me."

"Our business is finished here." Head and shoulders above Sophie,

Preston Kent's silver-striped suit gleamed with the light of the storm, as if he were Zeus himself.

"Do you mean—"

"We've secured a new maid for your mother. Rachel's been doing her best since Matilda died, but she's no maidservant. I don't blame her, of course, a housekeeper isn't trained to wait on the personal needs of a mistress the way your mother has been accustomed. We simply must have a proper replacement. A marvel I was able to get this chattel no. 256—calls herself Daphne—alone, with most slaves being sold in families."

"Has she none, then?"

"Not anymore." Mr. Kent puffed on his cigar, the wind stripping the sweet blue-grey smoke from his lips. "No. 257—apparently, her aged mother—died of consumption in the sheds just after the catalogues were printed. Fortuitous, yes?" She looked away. "Not for Daphne," she murmured. "Not for her mother."

"It's good business. For instance, why buy two horses—especially when one of them is infirm—for a one-horse carriage?"

"'No. 257'? Her name was Judy, Daddy, and she most certainly was n-not a h-horse!"

Preston's gaze pounced around them, until landing on Harrison, who had never strayed far from Sophie, and watched her still. Lips forged into an iron smile, Mr. Kent caught his daughter's wrist and cut his voice low as he led her away from the crowd. "You're making a scene. Don't embarrass me." His blue eyes slanted into glittering slits. "Is this what I can expect from you from now on? Blatant, public defiance?"

"I'm capable of walking without you dragging me." Sophie pulled away from him, but he only twisted harder. "You're treating me like a child. I'm nineteen years old, Da—"

"So was—" He dropped the thought like hot coal, but Sophie could read the unspoken. *So was Susan.*

"I'm nothing like her." Sophie was Daddy's little girl from the first.

Mr. Kent jerked her farther from any listening ears, wrenching her wrist harder, until her catalogue dropped from her weakened clutch. As her father scooped it up, the draft of the story she'd been working on last night peeked from between the pages. She reached for it, but he turned her notes toward the watery light of the rain-drenched sky.

"What's this now?" He squinted at her script as ash dripped from his waiting cigar. "A story? You were writing a story about the auction?"

"A newspaper article about the largest slave auction in history. I—I want to be a writer. Like you were, before you became editor."

The lines around his eyes softened as he looked down at her. "I still write, you know. But to be published—that is not a ladylike enterprise. There's a reason all the writers for the *Richmond Enquirer* are men."

"Not all." The words slipped from her lips like oil through her fingers. "Daddy." Her smile trembled as she gathered courage. "I have a surprise for you. Those columns you've been printing these last several months from a writer who goes by the name John Thornton . . ."

"Yes? With his anti-secession views it's no wonder he uses a pseudonym. Still, his arguments are sound and well-stated. What is it? You don't mean to say you want to write by a pseudonym, too?"

Sophie shook her head. "I've already done it." For a moment, she wondered if he'd heard her. "*I'm John Thornton*. You've already been printing me. Don't you see? You've already decided my words are as good as any man's."

Mr. Kent looked through her draft again. Winced. "What is the meaning of this?" He jabbed his finger at her words, a storm gathering in his eyes.

"I—I told you. I want to be a writer, like you."

But he was already stalking from beneath the shelter of the Grand Stand and into the driving rain. Sophie followed him, shoulders hunched, her boots sinking in mud.

"No." His voice matched the rolling thunder as he threw his cigar down and ground it beneath his heel. "Not like me. Like Harriet Beecher Stowe."

Sophie's spine straightened at the name of her secret heroine. With a single book, the woman had influenced millions. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* infuriated her father. "She wasn't wrong."

"And I suppose I am?"

Raw, wet wind swirled in the silence between them, knifing through Sophie's wrap as though it were made of lace.

"I never should have sent you to that boarding school in Philadelphia."

"Mother's old school—"

He held up his hand to stop her, as if he couldn't bear to be reminded that Eleanor Kent, the woman he'd married after his first wife died, was born and raised in Philadelphia and not in his native, beloved Virginia. "Yes, your mother. I blame myself for bowing to her demand that she nurse and raise you herself. You should have had a mammy from infancy, like every other child in the civilized South. You should have learned from the cradle that white people command the lives of colored. These are the proper roles for our races, Sophia Virginia! It is madness to suppose otherwise."

He paused for breath, and looked at her as though searching for the daughter he wanted to see. If he only knew their Richmond home had served as a stop along the Underground Railroad right beneath his nose . . . "Just how many abolitionist rallies did you attend for you to write such fanatical nonsense about a simple slave auction?"

She set her jaw and lifted her chin as the voices of Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, and the Grimke sisters washed over her.

"It ends now." Mr. Kent shredded her article draft, as well as the auction catalogue in which she had taken notes. "The writing must stop."

"Oh no, don't!" Sophie lunged for the remnants, her bonnet slipping off her head and bouncing against her back. Rain sprayed her face as mud puddles swallowed the crumpled remains of her story.

"Have I lost you, too?" Mr. Kent's face twisted. "After I've given you everything a father could possibly lavish on his child—you would

turn your back on me now?" He lurched one step toward her, then grimaced, his fist to his chest.

"A disagreement is not a personal betrayal." Blonde ringlets, teased free by the wind, clung to her face and neck.

"It is to me. This time." Blanching, he dropped to his knees in the spongy earth.

"Not your heart!" *Not again!* Wrapping her arms around his shoulders, Sophie knelt in the mud beside him. "I never wanted to hurt you!"

"Some things have been too painful—for me to speak of—" He collapsed onto his heels and leaned into her for support. Terror seized her breath.

Her father's eyes closed. "But you need to know this."

Still mute with fear, Sophie nodded, barely noticing the water dripping down the back of her neck, or the cold seeping into her from the ground up as she leaned in close to hear him.

"My parents didn't just die years ago as I told you . . . After I moved to Richmond to be a reporter, they—and my younger sisters—were killed in their beds. By slaves."

Sophie's stomach roiled.

Nat Turner's Rebellion. Did you learn about that—in Philadelphia? The slave said he'd been called—by God—to murder white people. So he—and dozens of other slaves—killed sixty good citizens in Southampton County. My—entire—family. I was twenty-two—when I lost them all. When you choose—to crusade for the slave—you reject me."

"No, Daddy, I—"

His groan stopped her. "You're all I have left."

Sophie wanted to deny it, to say he had Mother still. But he didn't, not really, and they both knew it.

"The one thing I want—and the one thing it seems I cannot have—is family. Truly," her father whispered. "You are breaking my heart." His lips pulled back as he clutched at his lapels once more.

“Let me go for a doctor.”

“Say it first. Say you’ll not betray me.”

All the speeches she’d rehearsed retreated behind her fear for her father. She’d planned on telling him she would always love him, but she was a grown woman now with a fine education, and that her conscience demanded she follow her own convictions. She was going to be strong.

Instead, she leaned over and planted a kiss on her father’s clammy brow. “I’ll always be your girl.”

"FROM THE TIME I knew right from wrong, it was my sad privilege to differ in many things from the perceived opinions of my locality. This has made my life intensely sad and earnest . . . [I became] quick in feeling and ready to resent what seemed to me wrong."

—ELIZABETH VAN LEW, Union loyalist in Richmond

Act One



THE PRIVILEGE TO DIFFER



Chapter One

Oakwood Cemetery, Richmond, Virginia
Thursday, September 24, 1863

Tell no one how it ended. Please,” Sophie murmured to Daphne, her gaze flicking over the precious few mourners receding from the graveside. A sticky breeze whispered through her black net veil as she bowed her head, praying she did not look as relieved as she felt to finally lay the past to rest. A thin ribbon of scar tissue itched beneath her wristband.

Questions swimming in their eyes, neighbors paid their respects to Sophie and took their leave until only the household staff and the family lawyer remained.

“My deepest condolences, Miss Kent.” Mr. Whittaker doffed his hat and smoothed his grey hair back from his brow. “You have sent word to your father, of course.”

She hadn’t. Part of her wanted to tell her father every detail, to make sure he knew how much his wife and daughter had both suffered.

She wanted to heap guilt upon him for joining the army and leaving home just when home became unbearable. It was easier to serve the Confederacy, she supposed, than to stay and serve what was left of his family.

"He receives mail at the prison camp?" Whittaker prodded.

"He does." *He also gets cold, I imagine, and weak, and sick. He is forty-seven-years old. What if I tell him about Mother and—it kills him?* Sophie balled her black-edged handkerchief in her hand. "Thank you for being here. If I might have a moment of your time, there is a matter I wish to discuss with you."

"Regarding your mother's property, I presume," said Whittaker.

Sun flashed on spectacles as Otto Fischer, the Kents' German immigrant steward, looked up. If the slaves had heard, however, none of them showed any sign of it.

"That's right."

"I have the documents with me." His tone was hushed as he glanced at the fresh mound of earth. "Shall we?"

While Daphne waited, Mr. Whittaker and Sophie put a respectful distance between themselves and the grave.

"Now, the only 'property' Mother personally owned, was Daphne," Sophie began. "When my father purchased her four years ago, she was to be my mother's maid, and freed upon Mother's death. My father said he'd secured this with you." He had also stipulated that Daphne not be informed of the arrangement, lest she have motive to end Eleanor's life herself.

"I remember."

Sophie's breath suspended while Whittaker slipped an envelope from inside his jacket. Then his frown sent dread trickling down her spine.

"Did Mr. Kent not inform you of the change?" He unsheathed the document. "The ownership of the property has been transferred."

Sophie blinked, unable to process the word. "Transferred?"

"Bequeathed. To you."

She gasped. "There must be some mistake. I don't own slaves."

"You do now, my dear."

No. No.

"You don't already have a maid, do you?" he continued. "It isn't fitting for a twenty-three-year-old woman to be without one. Besides, you know how folks would talk."

"No!" She reined in her voice. "No. I free her. I manumit her myself."

"I'm afraid that has not been left to your discretion. There is a codicil on the will. You may not sell or free her. She is to be yours for life. Daphne will be freed upon your death."

Or hers. Sophie's throat burned as she turned to look at Daphne. Though it was illegal for both of them, Sophie had taught her how to read and write for this day, so she'd be equipped for freedom. "She's thirty-six years old and has never lived according to her own wishes."

Mr. Whittaker held up his hand to stop her. "There is wisdom in this, Miss Kent. I know of your abolitionist leanings, and for your sake, I keep quiet about them." He sighed. "Couldn't be helped, I suppose, with your mother being from the North, and you going to school in Philadelphia. But you are no longer a child. It's time to leave childish thoughts behind you, and accept that this is the way things are. It is the way things *should* be."

She shook her head. But her lips refused to move.

"Accept this, my dear. It's what your parents wanted. Your father wrote you this letter to help explain. Again, my deepest regrets on your loss." His message delivered, he tipped his hat to her and left. By degrees, she absorbed the news, just as her black mourning dress absorbed the sun.

Nearby, warping lids of unburied green pine coffins popped loose, cracking through the air like gunshots, exposing the dead from Chimborazo Hospital to the glaring light of day. Sophie pressed her peppermint-scented handkerchief to her nose and returned to Daphne without the news she had longed to bring. Nothing had changed, after

all. Daphne was a slave before Eleanor Kent's death, and she was a slave still. *My slave.* Sophie's chest squeezed. *Are the sins of my father now mine?*

Alone in her bed chamber, Sophie's hands shook like linden leaves. Her father's words blurred on the page. *The Negro's happiest condition is that of bondage. Your mother and I could not punish Daphne with freedom.* Since when had Eleanor Preston believed that slaves should not be freed? It smacked of deception. Eleanor most likely had no idea her will had been changed.

The rest of the letter was a repeat of his farewell speech. He was sorry if his absence caused her pain, but after Lincoln announced his Emancipation Proclamation in September 1862, the war brazenly attacked slavery in a way it hadn't before. *But slavery is God-ordained,* he'd said, *and without it, the South cannot survive.* This was why he'd decided to fight. So that white Southerners could keep Negroes in bondage.

White Southerners like me. Her friends in Philadelphia would never believe it. *If Harrison could see me now . . .*

A sigh slipped from her. With Eleanor's body now removed from the house, Sophie withdrew the black crepe draping her mirror. The bright green eyes in the face that stared back at her were wiped of their former bright, inquisitive look. There was no sign in that reflection that its owner had once been the favorite child of her parents, and as protected from unpleasantness as any Southern girl could be. Those lips, which had been slow to speak but quick to smile, now lay flat. The face in the mirror was symmetrical but blank, vacant, so like her mother's at the end, it chilled her. *I was not strong enough to make a difference,* her mother had told her years ago. *But you are. You'll find a way.*

Sophie thought she had. But her father had cut her writing career short, and now it was too late. To even hint at the opinions she had formerly published as John Thornton would be her ticket to Castle Thunder,

the prison for political enemies, deserters, and citizens suspected of treason. *I have no voice at all.* She had failed her mother, and she had failed herself.

Sweeping out onto her second-story balcony, Sophie watched a flock of geese recede into the blue-and-gold edged sky, then let her gaze drift down Church Hill. From her house at the corner of Twenty-seventh and Franklin Streets, the James River was a gilded, wrinkled ribbon. Though Confederate ship masts at Rocketts Landing and the Navy Yard bristled along the banks, Sophie's mind's eye saw the Delaware River instead, and the island within it teeming with men. Since the stunning Confederate defeat at Gettysburg, her father was one of them. Still he controlled her, even from inside a Federal prison camp.

As she gripped the balustrade, her mourning gown stark against the weathered white railings, Sophie mourned indeed. The war had killed her mother and taken her father. Nearly every family in her neighborhood had a husband, father, brother, or son in the army. The widow Madeline Blair, the only neighbor who had called on the Kents since the war started, had sent three of her four sons. Two of them had already been killed.

While Sophie had been ensconced in her home tending Eleanor, the war had turned her beloved, provincial Richmond into an overcrowded metropolis. The city was bursting with both living and dead, the way unburied corpses burst their coffins. Danger lapped at Richmond so often the tocsin in Capitol Square sounded with the regularity of a grandfather clock. The stakes could not be higher, and yet Sophie had barely even been a spectator, so entrenched had she been with Eleanor.

Marching footsteps grew louder, and Sophie turned toward the dipping sun. Dusty columns of soldiers—hundreds of them, maybe thousands—tramped toward her on Franklin Street. They wore blue. Prisoners from the dazzling Rebel victory at Chickamauga, no doubt. On either side of the street, windows opened, and women and children

leaned out to watch. As the prisoners came closer, the jeers that followed them grew louder, too.

Well, you've come to Richmond at last, now where's your arms?

Oh, is these the kind of brutes that has come down here to kill our noble sons?

"Miss Sophie?" Daphne's rich voice drifted out to the balcony. "You hungry for supper? You need anything?"

Sophie beckoned her out on the porch with her. "I need these prisoners to be soldiers again." Her words tasted of treason. "And so do you."

Daphne cocked her eyebrow. "You sound just like your mama, God rest her."

Her throat burned. She wanted Daphne to be free, along with the rest of the Kent slaves. But, "My father says you're to be my maidservant now."

She bowed. "I'm grateful to stay."

Sophie nodded, mustering her own gratitude that at least her father had not decided to sell Daphne outright. Still, "Do you ever imagine living your life for yourself?"

A short laugh popped from Daphne's lips. "Now what good could come of such a notion? It ain't fitting to dwell on what can't be."

"Look." Sophie pointed at the prisoners now snaking south and east. Some of them may have fought against her father. But they also fought against slavery. "Those men don't think it 'can't be.' If the North wins, you're free. Immediately and forever. If the South wins, slavery will go on just as it has for centuries."

Daphne's shoulders squared. "Well, then. Let the white men fight. Ain't nothing we can do about it."

But as Sophie watched the prisoners pack into the waterfront warehouse that was now Libby Prison, she wondered if Daphne was wrong.