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20th Nov 24th 1862

Heroines Behind the Lines



CIVIL WAR  
BOOK I

# WEDDED *to* WAR

JOCELYN GREEN

We hope you enjoy this complimentary digital excerpt of *Wedded to War* by Jocelyn Green.

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*Heroines Behind the Lines*

CIVIL WAR

BOOK 1

# WEDDED *to* WAR

JOCELYN GREEN

MOODY PUBLISHERS  
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Though many of the events in this story are based on true incidents, characters are either fictional or depicted fictitiously. Dates of events are given as closely as possible to their occurrences, though some exceptions were made to fit the fictional timeline.

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*Printed in the United States of America*

*For Rob,  
who never made me choose between  
following my heart and nurturing my mind,  
And for my parents,  
who believed I was a writer before I could even spell.*



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## *A Note on the Sanitary Commission*

*A*nyone who has benefitted from the Red Cross owes a nod of gratitude to the United States Sanitary Commission, the forerunner of one of today's most recognized charitable organizations.

At the start of the Civil War, Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell—a personal friend of Florence Nightingale's—realized the Union army needed help if it were to avoid the tragic preventable deaths of the Crimean War. She organized four thousand women of New York City into the Women's Central Relief Association, which prompted the government to establish the United States Sanitary Commission in July 1861. This Commission was headed by men but grew into more than seven thousand local branches totaling hundreds of thousands of women.

The Sanitary Commission set up supply stations and hospitals, hired nurses, collected donations, sent inspectors to Union hospitals (to evaluate hygiene conditions that directly affected men's health), and taught troops in camp how to cook food properly to prevent the spread of disease. They also organized and staffed a fleet of hospital ships both in the east and west.

Though it often clashed with the army's Medical Department, especially in the beginning of the war, the Commission saved hundreds of thousands of lives, with the help of an army of women volunteers.

Though *Wedded to War* is a work of fiction, the story was inspired by one Sanitary Commission nurse, Georgeanna Woolsey, whose letters and journals, written 150 years ago, offer a thorough look of what pioneering women nurses endured during these turbulent times.

**IT WAS HARD WORK** getting myself acceptable and accepted. What with people at home, saying "Goodness me! A nurse!" "All nonsense!" "Such a fly-away!" and what with the requisites insisted upon by the grave committees, I came near losing my opportunity.

First, one must be just so old, and no older; have eyes and a nose and mouth expressing just such traits, and no others; must be willing to scrub floors, if necessary, etc., etc. Finally, however, by dint of taking the flowers out of my bonnet and the flounce off my dress; by toning down, or toning up, according to the emergency, I succeeded in getting myself looked upon with mitigated disapprobation, and was at last sat upon by the committee and passed over to the Examining Board.

—GEORGEANNA WOOLSEY, written for the New York Sanitary Commission Fair, 1864

**"GEORGY IS MORE EARNEST** than ever about being a nurse for the soldiers. *I shall never consent to this arrangement unless some of her own family go with her.*"

—JANE ELIZA NEWTON WOOLSEY (Georgeanna's mother) in a letter, May 1861

# *Act One*



## THE CALL



## Chapter One

New York City  
Monday, April 22, 1861

When Charlotte and her sister Alice told their mother they were taking the omnibus down Broadway, they weren't lying. They just didn't tell her where they would be getting off. There was simply no time for an argument today.

Boarding at Fourteenth Street, the sisters paid the extra fare for their hoop skirts, as if they were separate passengers, and sat back on the hard wooden benches for the ride.

"This is against my better judgment, you know." Alice's voice was barely audible above the clatter of wheels and horses hooves over the cobblestones.

"Don't you mean Jacob's?" Charlotte cast a sidelong glance at her sister.

Alice twirled a ringlet of her honey-blond hair around her finger—a nervous childhood habit she'd never outgrown—but said nothing.

She didn't have to. Ever since she had married the wealthy businessman a few months ago, she had been even more pampered—and sheltered—than she had been growing up. Heaven help her when they reached their destination.

"I'll have you home by tea time and none the worse for wear." Charlotte's voice was softened by just a hint of guilt. "I promise."

Alice nodded. Any further conversation would soon be drowned out by the cacophony of Broadway.

The avenue pulsed with life, like an artery coursing down the island of Manhattan. Ten days into the war, recruiting offices for the Union army had already cropped up along the avenue, their entrances clogged with eager young men. Between Canal Street and Houston, the street teemed with gentlemen in spats and ladies in silks, their musk colognes and lavender perfumes cloying on the warm breeze. The white marble façade of St. Nicholas Hotel between Broome and Spring Streets dominated the west side of Broadway. In front of The Marble House facing Canal Street, porters in their brass-buttoned, blue-uniforms opened carriage doors and held umbrellas over their customers.

But Charlotte and Alice did not get off at any of these places. At least not today. For just a few blocks south of The Marble House, and just a few blocks east of the German-Jewish secondhand clothing shops on lower Broadway, the steady pulse of polished society gave way to the erratic beat of Five Points, the world's most notorious slum.

Alice squeezed her sister's hand so tightly Charlotte couldn't tell it if was motivated by anxiety or anger for bringing her here.

If Broadway was Manhattan's artery, Five Points was its abscess: swollen with people, infected with pestilence, inflamed with vice and crime. Grogeries, brothels, and dance halls put private sin on public display. Although the neighborhood seemed fairly self-contained, more fortunate New Yorkers were terrified of Five Points erupting, spreading its contagion to the rest of them.

This was where the Waverly sisters got off.

Competing emotions of fear and excitement tugged at Charlotte's

heart as she hoisted the skirt of her amber-colored day dress above her ankles and made a beeline for Worth Street. "Come on, Alice." She cocked her head at her dumbstruck sister. Foul-smelling wind pulled strands of hair from their coifs, crept into their noses and coated their throats. Charlotte had forgotten how the smell of poverty would stick to her skin. She'd have to scrub herself with sugar, olive oil, and lemon water as soon as she returned home.

A violet-scented handkerchief to her nose, Alice held her ivory parasol low over her head, blocking out as much of the view as possible as she began walking. "Tell me again, just exactly what we're doing here?"

Charlotte grinned. "I've got an idea."

Alice broke her stride long enough to groan. "Why do I have this funny feeling it isn't a good one?"

Charlotte shot Alice half-hearted glare. "Whatever you do you mean," she muttered under her breath.

"Remember your 'great' idea to adopt that lame squirrel and keep it as a pet?"

"I let it go, you know."

Alice paused long enough to skirt a child hawking apples from a corner. "Only after it chewed through five of Mother's best doilies and made a nest in the velvet armchair."

"I was ten!"

"And I was eight, and still old enough to know better. There were other times, too, like when you chose that outrageous reading on the value of a woman's education to recite for our class at finishing school. Completely incongruous with the context of the school."

Charlotte chuckled and tucked a silky lock of hair behind her ear. "Exactly why it was so perfect! But today's idea is even better. I've found a way to actually *do* something for the war effort."

"And what do you call knitting socks for the troops? Rolling band-aids? Doesn't that mean anything?"

"Of course it does. But I mean something else. Something *more*."

“Is that so?” Tilting her parasol to the side, Alice squinted into the glaring sunshine and looked around. “Where are we going, anyway?”

A drunken man leered at the sisters from a rotting doorway, raising the hair on Charlotte’s neck. “The House of Industry. It’s just up ahead.”

Ducking under her parasol again, Alice picked up her pace. “Then let’s hustle.”

Charlotte couldn’t agree more. It was becoming harder to ignore the bareheaded and bare-chested women standing in doorways of “Public Houses,” calling out to passersby and quoting their prices in broad daylight. Within moments, tattered children flocked to Charlotte and Alice, whose parasols, gloves, and fashionable gowns clearly announced the presence of wealth. The clamor of the children’s voices made it was impossible to decide whether they were begging for money, selling something, or merely trying to pick their pockets. Topsy wooden houses—hovels, really—leaned lopsided against each other for support while angry voices shot out from within. Even the air was a dirty yellow, like a fevered complexion. By the time they reached their destination, Charlotte noticed she had been holding her breath. The vapors in this area were enough to make one sick.

“Miss Waverly, come in.” Mr. Lewis Pease, founder of the House of Industry, waved them inside the six-story brick building. “And who is this lovely young woman?”

“Forgive me, this is my younger sister Alice—Mrs. Jacob Carlisle, as of a few months ago. She’s in town visiting for a spell while her husband is away on business.”

Pease bowed slightly. “Pleasure to meet you. Mr. Dorsheimer is already here,” he added in a whisper, as a barrel-chested man on corkscrew legs appeared.

“Philip Dorsheimer,” he bellowed, thrusting out his hand to Charlotte. “Treasurer, State of New York and New York State Military Board.” His jowls quivered as he spoke. His features were thick and puffy, as though he had been formed out of a loaf of bread dough.

“Pleased to meet you, Mr. Dorsheimer. I’m Charlotte Waverly, and

this is my sister Mrs. Carlisle. I used to work here as an instructor." *Until Mother put an end to it.* "When I heard of your need I immediately knew the women here could help. I see you have already met Mr. Pease."

He grunted in the affirmative.

A strained smile tipped Mr. Pease's lips. "Yes, thank you Miss Waverly. I was just about to give Mr. Dorsheimer a tour. Unless you have been here before?"

Dorsheimer cleared his throat. "Oh, I've been to the Points before, but not here in this building." Of course. Well-to-do New Yorkers often came down to see Five Points for themselves to satisfy their curiosity. "Well, allow us to show you around before we discuss the details of contracting with us for sewing your uniforms" said Mr. Pease, leading the way. "This is a fairly new headquarters for us, and we're rather proud of it. This corridor leads to the workshops where neighborhood teens and adults learn several trades. We started out just teaching basic sewing, but now we also teach baking, shoemaking, corset making, basket weaving, and millinery. Go ahead, look around."

Dorsheimer squeezed past Mr. Pease and tossed cursory glances into a few of the workshops.

"We have more than five hundred workers currently. Five hundred!" Mr. Pease beamed. "I pay the workers according to what they produce. Sewers can earn up to \$2.50 a week—now I know that doesn't sound like much to you and me, Mr. Treasurer, but it's a lot more than needlewomen normally earn. We've also opened a day school for the children so they are educated, fed, and even clothed while the parents work at their trades here."

They walked a little further and turned in to a large open room. "This is the chapel where we hold religious services," Mr. Pease continued. "Of course there is also the Five Points Mission just across the street, whose primary objective is to feed the souls and point them to new life in Christ. The House of Industry began as a branch of the Mission, because I found they had a hard time hearing the Bible when their stomachs were growling. And what better way to feed the multitudes

than to teach them a trade so they can feed themselves?"

If Dorsheimer felt anything, he hid it well in those doughy folds of skin. The palms of Charlotte's gloves began to dampen with sweat.

"One last thing I'd like to show you." Climbing a set of stairs brought them to a well-ventilated floor with spacious dormitories, each with white iron beds that vermin couldn't penetrate. "We started out housing our worker women, so they wouldn't need to go back to the brothels at night. But now we also shelter dozens of abused, neglected, or homeless children who are waiting for adoptive parents."

Mr. Dorsheimer, winded from the exertion of the climb, did not look impressed.

"These rooms are humble enough, indeed," Charlotte added, "but when you consider many of these people are used to sleeping on the bare floor of a room with no windows and laid out like sardines in a can, you can understand the charm of a bed and some—air, can't you?" Calling it "fresh air" would have been a lie. With human waste collecting in trenches behind most Five Points tenements, no air had been fresh here for decades. At least windows allowed circulation.

Dorsheimer glanced at his pocket watch. "This is all very well and good," he huffed, "but can we get to the bottom line? How much would it cost to give you the contract? I need twelve thousand uniforms, and I need them as quickly as possible."

Mr. Pease turned to Charlotte. "Yes, of course," she said. "We propose a payment from the state's Military Board of thirteen cents per shirt, so that would be a total of fifteen hundred sixty dollars. Total." She bit her lip.

"Fifteen hundred dollars?"

Charlotte stole a glance at Mr. Pease. *Was that a lot? Or not very much?*

"Fifteen hundred *sixty* dollars, sir. To be precise. Plus, you'd supply the flannel and buttons," she said.

"I need more than just shirts, miss." Dorsheimer's tone was sharp, biting. "I need trousers, jackets, and overcoats, too, and I need it all in

three weeks. Twelve thousand sets. And *you* provide the material. Not me. Do I look like I'm in the garment business?"

Alice's eyes widened into large pools of cornflower blue. Charlotte's narrowed into dark slits.

"Twelve thousand complete uniforms in three weeks." Mr. Pease let out a low whistle. "I wish I could say we could do that, Mr. Dorsheimer, but you're asking for a huge sum on an extremely short deadline. Not only can we not perform miracles, but I doubt any single company in New York could do a satisfactory job under your specifications."

"Brooks Brothers can. They already made a bid, and I need to decide by tonight."

"I'm sure if we joined together with a few other sewing organizations, we could do it," said Charlotte, swiveling between Mr. Pease and Mr. Dorsheimer. "But we need a little more time to make the arrangements. This contract would mean a great deal to the House of Industry and to the workers in a financial sense, but it would also be a perfect way they could serve their country and their fighting men at war. You could be guaranteed of fine quality products made by conscientious workers."

"Not possible. The boys are going to war, and they need to be clothed. I'm closing the deal this afternoon."

"Mr. Dorsheimer, please. Consider the greater value of giving a charity the contract. The House of Industry has made a profound impact on Five Points, rescuing people from poverty—and the immorality that sometimes goes with it—and helping them walk a better road."

Mr. Dorsheimer raised a hand to stop her, but she didn't slow down.

"I'm sure you know President Lincoln came to Five Points just last year, just before his Cooper Union speech that launched him toward the presidency, but what did he choose to see in Five Points? Not the brothels or grogeries, but the House of Industry."

"Miss—" He tried again.

"Because the good work we do here inside these walls is becoming

even more famous than the degradation outside of them. Invest in the House of Industry with this uniform contract, Mr. Dorsheimer, and you'll be getting the products you want and doing society a favor at the same time. Can you say that about Brooks Brothers?"

At the end of her speech now, Charlotte caught her breath Alice stared at her in disbelief. No one said a word until Mr. Dorsheimer jabbed a stubby finger at Charlotte.

"My responsibility, young woman, is to the State of New York, not to your pet project here in the slums."

Charlotte's face burned.

"The contract goes to Brooks Brothers."

Mr. Pease, Charlotte, and Alice watched as Dorsheimer huffed out of the building. "It was worth a try, Miss Waverly," Mr. Pease said.

Alice leveled her gaze at Charlotte. "Another good idea, right Charlotte?"

Frustration swelled in Charlotte's chest. "Why? Why would you say such a thing? It was a great idea! It made so much sense!"

"Charlotte, when will you ever realize that not everyone sees the world as you do? You act so surprised when others disagree with you, when you are the one stepping out of the range of normal."

Charlotte crossed her arms tightly across her waist. "You used to look up to me." Her throat grew tight with the unshed tears of bitter disappointment. "You used to believe in me."

Alice laid a tentative hand on Charlotte's arm. "I believe your intentions are good. But once again, you spoke too boldly. Perhaps if you had not been so vehement with your outburst, Mr. Dorsheimer would at least have considered giving you the contract." Alice sighed, resignation in her eyes. "You must—you *must*—know your place, dear sister, or one of these days, you will stand to lose much more than a sewing contract."

Charlotte opened her mouth to deny it, but could make no reply.



Curling up on the plush cushioned bench inside the bay window, Charlotte welcomed the bundle of marmalade and cream fur that bounded onto her lap.

Still stinging from her failure at the House of Industry, Charlotte was in no mood to be courted today. But courting season had arrived with the daffodils, and it would not be put off, even for war. No, courting was serious business. She should know. She had been through ten years of it herself, and not one had produced a suitable match. Still, she couldn't help but assume some of the blame for that.

*This year will be different*, her mother kept telling her. Perhaps she was right. Even so, by the time Phineas Hastings took his leave of her front parlor this Sunday afternoon, she was more than ready for some solitude.

Charlotte held nothing against Mr. Hastings. In fact, she had respected the law professor ever since she had met him at a guest lecture given by Frederick Douglass at the Broadway Tabernacle. Mr. Hastings was intelligent, charming, well-bred, and educated. *Not quite as tall as—* She shook her head as if to erase the thought. Comparing every suitor to a ghost from her past served no one.

Importantly, her mother approved of Phineas. A wry smile lifted Charlotte's lips. Little did Caroline know, however, that as soon as she had put an end to Charlotte's work at the House of Industry, Phineas had given the charity a large donation—all the proceeds from a recent lecture he had given—just to cheer Charlotte up. Since then he had made a few more donations, perhaps more to win Charlotte's affections rather than from his own concern for Five Points, but she didn't care. It was working.

In addition to teaching law, Mr. Hastings was one of New York's most well-known crusaders for abolitionism. His fiery rhetoric—and the fact that he had shared the stage with Douglass, even if only for a moment—left her in awe of him from the start. Most men didn't understand why Charlotte attended lectures, but Mr. Hastings had actually seemed to enjoy conversing with her about politics and culture, religion and philosophy. It was what had attracted her to him in the first place. He wasn't afraid of a woman who used her brain.

"Then again," Charlotte told Dickens, "I might be happier if I just didn't think so much." She leaned her head against the windowpane, her cat still warming her lap. Discontent seeped into her, like the cold damp air through the glass. Large, wooly clouds sagged in the air, snagging on church steeples and streetlights as they drifted across a grey flannel sky. Every roll of thunder echoed the rumblings of her spirit.

The passionate preaching from the pulpit this morning and the

newspaper she thumbed through now deepened her unrest. Since the Civil War had begun almost two weeks ago, New York City had rallied together for the Union cause, but the news headlines did not support its optimism. Virginia had seceded. Troops on their way to Washington were attacked in Baltimore. Several railroad bridges were burned to prevent Union troops from passing from Baltimore to Washington, and the rioting continued. Col. Robert E. Lee officially resigned his commission with the US Army to lead Rebel troops instead. A Southern attack on the Federal capital was imminent.

And she wasn't doing a thing about it.

Sighing, she reached for the Blue Willow teacup on the walnut table next to her, and breathed in the fragrance of orange and cloves. She picked up the *New York Times* and froze. Without taking her eyes off the paper, she rattled the cup back on its saucer.

#### Call for Nursing Candidates by the Women's Central Association for Relief

Women have not hitherto been employed in military hospitals as nurses. The nursing is done by soldiers drafted out of the ranks for that purpose. . . .

Nursing in military hospitals is a very different thing from nursing in civil hospitals, and still more from private nursing. The class of patients to be nursed, the character of the under nurses, who will always be men, the social isolation of the position, and the absolute necessity of enforcing military discipline, combine to render nursing in military hospitals a service of peculiar difficulty which can only be accomplished successfully by a select and disciplined band of nurses.

The following regulations for selecting candidates have been drawn up—these regulations being approved by the Hospital Association to whom they were submitted.

Age.—Each candidate must be between the ages of thirty and

forty-five years, exceptions being only made in the case of nurses of valuable experience.

Health.—Only women of strong constitutions will be received; chronic disease, or other physical weakness, disqualifying for service.

Character.—Every applicant must present a written testimonial or introduction from a responsible person who can be seen. Only persons of the highest respectability will be received. Discipline.—A promise of cordial compliance with all the regulations of the service will be required.

Dress.—A regulation dress will be appointed by the board, which each nurse will be required to adopt, no hoops being allowed in the service.

Number of Candidates.—Ten Bands, or a class of one hundred, will now be enrolled, due notice being given in the daily journals when the lists are full. Should a second corps be needed the call will again be published in the papers.

The Registration Committee meet daily in the Cooper Institute in the Philosophical Rooms, on the fourth floor, between the hours of two and four P.M. They earnestly invite all ladies possessing the necessary qualifications to present themselves for registration.

Those who are fitted by nature and position to engage in this new and difficult work, will render invaluable aid to their country by devoting themselves to its thorough accomplishment.

Signed,  
Drs. Elizabeth Blackwell,  
Edward Delafield,  
J.R. Wood, and  
Elisha Harris.

She read the notice again.

*Are they crazy?*

As the first woman to earn a medical degree in the United States, Dr. Blackwell could be expected to come up with such an outrageous plan to insert women into the men's sphere of work. But there were three other doctors' names attached, all highly distinguished men.

Wincing from being in the same position for too long, Charlotte unfolded her legs from under her, sending Dickens to the floor, and began to pace the room, the ribboned hem of her wide skirt skimming the French rug beneath her feet. Just imagine. Women serving their country so close to the seat of action! She had read all about Florence Nightingale but never dreamed such a thing would be possible in this country. They must be desperate for help.

But she was too young, according to the requirements printed in the paper. And even if she were old enough, she would be of absolutely no use as a nurse. She could barely stand the mention of blood, let alone the sight of it, ever since her father's death. Her mother, Caroline, would never allow it. Well-bred women had no business getting their hands dirty, she could almost hear her say. It was the reason Caroline had discouraged her from continuing her work at the House of Industry.

Thunder grumbled outside, and the clouds, finally ripped open from beneath, released their cargo. Raindrops fell fat and heavy on the cobblestones, the rooftops, the carriages out for a Sunday ride, like a drummer boy's steady tapping, calling the men to war.

*And the women to opportunity.*

Like a bolt of lightning, the idea jolted through her. Her eyes darted around the room, surveying the evidence of affluence to which she was accustomed. Crystal and candlesticks. Heavy velvet draperies. A black marble fireplace veined with gold. Tufted chairs the color of fine wine, a cream and gold chaise longue, claw-footed tables topped with delicately-scented orchids. Gilt-edged paintings on the wall, Roman busts on mahogany pedestals. If she was a nurse, she would trade it all in for the most Spartan of lifestyles, she felt sure. Would she still be a true lady without all of the trappings? Without her hoops and jewelry?

Her feet were still now, and a smile tugged at the corner of her lips.

Energy coursed through her body like the electric charge in the air just outside her window.

*Am I crazy?*

She had no loved ones fighting in the war—no husband, no brother, no father. So why did she feel compelled to give of herself in such a personal way to strangers?

Charlotte reached into the writing desk for paper and pen so she could sort out her thoughts in front of her. Instead, she pulled out a small black Bible—her father’s Bible. It fell open where it was bookmarked, and a single underlined verse jumped out at her. Luke 6:36: “Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.”

Yes, her heavenly Father was merciful, and so was her earthly father. Until it killed him.

Pressing her fingertips to her eyelids, she rocked back and forth on the edge of her chair, trying desperately to fill her mind with something—anything—other than the memories that came unbidden now.

---

She was sixteen years old when the cholera epidemic ravaged New York City. The worst breakouts were in the slums. Most wealthy people were in no danger, as long as they kept from the contaminated areas of the city. Hiding in their brownstone, the Waverly women believed they were safe. Charles, for whom Charlotte had been named, went to his office on Wall Street at the same time every day just the same, and came straight home. The disease would never touch them if they just stayed away.

Then Charles Waverly didn’t go to work one day. Or the next day, or the next. He couldn’t even get out of bed, but stayed near the bathroom day and night. Diarrhea and vomiting that sometimes lasted hours at a time sucked the life from his body. The doctor was summoned and pronounced it cholera.

“How can that be?”

He was barely strong enough to answer his wife. “The new hospi-

tal for cholera patients on Orange Street, above the tavern. I visited them to read to them, pray with them.”

“You what! But Charles, that’s in Five Points!”

“You know as well as I do that New York wouldn’t stand for a cholera hospital being built anywhere else. Of course it’s in Five Points.”

“Those people led harsh lives. Everyone says the disease is God’s judgment on them; they got what they deserved. Why would you visit them?”

“We don’t get to choose who deserves to hear God’s Word, Caroline, or who deserves comfort in their last days. Aren’t we to love our neighbors? Aren’t these people our neighbors?”

“You called this down upon yourself, then, Charles, and now you have brought it into our home. I’m taking the girls with me to my sister’s house outside the city.”

But Charlotte, her daddy’s girl, refused to leave. Someone had to stay with him and care for him. Her mother’s pride would not allow him to go to the cholera hospital along with all the slum’s worst cases. Charlotte remained and followed the doctor’s orders for his care the best she could.

Soon his face was sunken, his teeth and eyes appearing too large for his face. She sat by his side as they bled him, first with leeches, then with a lancet. Time after time, she watched the scarlet ribbon flow out from his veins. The doctor wouldn’t stop until her father fainted. Sometimes the bleeding ended after only ten ounces of blood had been drawn, sometimes it went on until twenty-four.

Nausea plagued her nearly every moment, from the stench of disease, from the sight of his blood escaping his veins, from the palpable fear that all of this misery would not be redeemed, but would end only in death.

Their family friend Caleb Lansing was the only other person who ventured inside her house during that time. He helped Charlotte clean up after her father, disposed of the soiled sheets, and scrubbed the floors, since the servants had all deserted the house. He brought food for Charlotte and urged her to eat, even when she was so tired he had to put the

spoon the soup into her mouth himself. He let her sleep while he took watch with Charles, for ever since Caleb's mother had died, making him an orphan, Charles had been like a father to him as well.

Nothing worked.

Charles continued to decline until his bones pushed against his skin like twigs ready to poke through parchment. His skin turned an unearthly shade of blue, and still they bled him. And bled him.

And still Charlotte watched, with nothing to distract her from her morbid vigil save Caleb's regular visits. Her world shrunk down to the size of her father's bedroom and the bathroom that joined, and it was colored with only a few shades of nature's kaleidoscope. Black: the long nights of watching. Yellow: the white's of her father's eyes, the color of his teeth. Blue: the tint of his skin. And red: the blood the doctor felt sure was the problem, the blood that had to flee his body, the blood that fell in a ragged crimson stream. The blood that stained her hands, her clothes. Her heart.

Until one day, Charles never woke up from his faint. His agony was at an end, and all that was left was his shriveled up shell.

The next time Caleb arrived, he had to pull her off her father's disease-ridden body. Gently, tenderly, he led her to the kitchen, heated water on the stove, and sponged clean her face and hands. He scrubbed the blood and filth from beneath her fingernails, brushed her hair, made her a cup of tea. Her hands trembled as she took it, sloshing it over the cup's edge and onto her hands. She barely felt the burn.

"What do I do? What do I do? What do I do?" Her mind could form no other thought, and like a child, she repeated herself over and over and over.

"You breathe in. Now breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out, Charlie," he said, using her father's pet name for her. "You put a bite of food in your mouth. You chew it up, and you swallow it. Even though you won't be hungry, even though you won't be able to taste a thing. You go to bed when it's dark, you wake up when it's light. You clean yourself up and get dressed. These are the things that living people do. And you are still alive."

His words were firm, but tears spilled down his cheeks. "A part of you will be buried with your father, and I don't know how to get that back. But I do know not all of you has died. You live."

He took her hand. "You live. You live. . . You live."

She looked at him and realized he had felt this pain before.

"You have to help me," she pleaded.

He engulfed her in an embrace then, and the full force of her grief exploded against his shoulder. Racking sobs shook them both. He didn't let go until she had stopped crying, even though her dress was stained with a dead man's filth and she hadn't taken the time to bathe in days. Still, he held her, stroked her greasy hair as if it was the softest down.

"I miss him," she choked out.

"I know what he would say to you if he could," Caleb told her. "This is what he said to me when my own mother died: '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. . . . My flesh and my heart faileth; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.'"

Finally, Charlotte's shoulders had stopped heaving. She had fallen asleep on Caleb's shoulder to the whispered lullaby of God's Word.

That was twelve years ago.

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The room flashed brighter for an instant as lightning cracked the sky, bringing Charlotte back to the present. She focused again on the open Bible on the desk.

*Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.*

By now her tea was cold, but her heart was on fire. Dickens sat like a sphinx on the writing desk in front of her, watching her with unblinking eyes, as if waiting for her decision.

She couldn't please her mother, but maybe she could please her father. She had to try.



## Chapter Three

*B*y morning, the sky was clear, but a new storm was brewing in the Waverly brownstone on Sixteenth Street.

“Why Charlotte, you can’t be considering it.”

Charlotte glanced at her mother through a cloud of pale fuzz suspended in the air between them, her hands pausing for only a moment from vigorously scraping lint for the Union army’s wounded. Maybe someday soon, she would be the one to pack lint into some poor soldier’s wound. “Yes, Mother, I thought I would at least try.”

“But, my dear girl, nursing is a man’s job.” Caroline’s knitting needles clicked to a rhythm of their own.

“I’m hardly a girl anymore, Mother.”

“Indeed. Twenty-eight—you’re a spinster, my dear, and you even have the cat to prove it.”

Charlotte’s eyelids thinned to a glare as she focused on the lint gathering in her lap. “That’s unfair, Mother. Dickens was the only kitten from our childhood pet. Father said I should keep him.”

Caroline waved the rebuttal aside. “You are only lucky that you’ve

kept your youthful complexion and figure. But if you pursue nursing, you will degrade your respectability and hopes of marrying if you make such a venture.”

Denial wrinkled Charlotte’s brow. “Mr. Hastings is known for his strong support of abolitionism, a pillar of the Union cause. I have no reason to believe he will not be supportive of me doing what I can to aid our troops as well.”

“You are not married yet. Don’t jeopardize your future.”

Charlotte sighed. “This isn’t about my future, Mother.” All of her life, she had been trained and groomed for one purpose—to increase her value as a prospective wife of an upstanding, wealthy man. At Rutgers Female Institute, she had studied mathematics, French, natural philosophy, painting, needlework, drawing, and sacred vocal music. She and Alice had completed courses at a finishing school for young ladies in Philadelphia and had attended classes on church history and biblical literature at Union Theological Seminary, their father’s wish. While she genuinely enjoyed her education, she knew it was intended to increase her chances for a good match. Now it was time to do something for a greater cause.

“Is it too much to think I might have some value for our country aside from getting married and having children?” She knew the question would shock her mother, and almost regretted saying it. Truthfully, she did want to have a family of her own someday, to manage a home, support a husband, and raise God-fearing children. But there was something else inside her she knew couldn’t be fulfilled by that alone.

Charlotte set her work aside and swept a fine layer of lint from her braided tunic and full olive skirt of her at-home dress. Rising, she paced the back parlor and fanned herself with her long, piano-trained fingers. Though the weather outside was only a crisp sixty-four degrees, heat crawled up her neck.

The back parlor she circled was hardly recognizable from its previous days. Formerly used by the Waverlys for checkers and singing around the piano, it now resembled a clearinghouse for hospital supplies. The

smells of ladies at leisure—rosewater, coffee, almond pastries—had given way to the smells of ladies preparing men for war, due to the crates of cologne, jams, pickles, tobacco, lemons, and cocoa. A bandage roller screwed into the top of a mahogany table was the centerpiece of the room, and the walls were lined with bundles of shirts, drawers, socks, and handkerchiefs. This parlor was now one of the most popular places for members of the Women's Central Association of Relief to share news while tearing flannel and cotton into strips, rolling bandages, scraping lint, knitting socks, and sewing shirts, drawers, and pillowcases for the W.C.A.R. to distribute.

"Charlotte, stop." Caroline set down her knitting and crossed the distance to reach her daughter. She gripped her hands in her own. "You would exhaust yourself. That training program would make a tiresome schedule for you, and I will not allow you to give up your regular French and voice lessons. You know people call you a songbird."

Charlotte's heart squeezed. "I'd rather be a Nightingale. I want to do something useful. I want to make a difference."

"Yes, Florence Nightingale did amazing things for the British army in the Crimean War," conceded Caroline. "But she didn't do it alone. She couldn't have done anything without help from the home front, in fact. Don't you think organizing and distributing supplies for the armies is useful? What do you think would happen to our boys if they had no bandages, no clothing, no clean shirts, or soft places to lay their weary heads at night? Isn't the work we do here in this parlor making a difference?"

"Of course it is," Alice stepped in, bearing bolts of flannel. "Who says it isn't?"

Caroline turned, dropping her daughter's hands. "Charlotte wants to be a nurse."

Alice raised her eyebrows. "A nurse."

*Isn't it about time for you to go back home?* Charlotte clenched her teeth before the unkind thought escaped her lips. Inhaling a deep breath, she tried again. "I really don't see what all the fuss is about. Elizabeth Blackwell, as you well know, is a doctor. And a prominent, well-

respected member of society, I might add. She spearheaded the entire Women's Central Association of Relief to make up for the men's lack of services to our nation's soldiers. And the New York Infirmary for Women and Children she started has had great success."

A lopsided smile curved on Alice's lips. "It's a charity, Charlotte. It's busy because it's free, and poor people are always sick. Especially in the slums near her infirmary."

Charlotte spun on her heel, turning her back on her sister while she mastered her tongue and the very unrefined expression of anger on her face.

Slowly swiveling back around, she modulated her tone. "All I'm trying to say is this. In the person of Elizabeth Blackwell, we have a prime example of a woman fulfilling a job—no, a calling—that has previously been strictly relegated to the male sphere. She does her work competently. She makes a difference in the world."

"She is the *only* woman with an American medical degree in the entire country, Charlotte," Caroline said. "Word has it that she used her profession as a barrier to matrimony."

"Oh fiddlesticks!" Charlotte was exasperated now. "Pure mean-spirited gossip! Even if it were true, it's beside the point, anyway."

"You are mistaken, daughter. It is the *entire* point, precisely. A woman should be married, as Alice is, and have children and manage her household. If your husband agrees it is fitting for you to do charity work as well, so long as it does not interfere with your duties at home, so be it. But charity work, or pursuing men's work, is not the primary aim of a young woman."

A palpable silence filled the air between the three women, broken only by the reverberating rumble of marching feet and martial music blocks away.

"Charlotte," her mother began again. "You are swimming upstream with this new-fangled idea of women nurses. You are going the wrong direction."

"I can help," she whispered. "I know I can."

“Child.” The quaver in Caroline’s voice betrayed her. “That’s what your father said when he went to visit that cholera hospital on Orange Street. That’s what you said when you stayed behind to nurse him. You were both wrong! Don’t you see? You’re wrong!”

Charlotte’s deep breath was constricted by the corseted bodice of her dress. “I feel like I’m suffocating in here. I’m going to get some air.” With a fistful of skirts in her hand, she swept toward the door, leaving a wake of swirling lint behind her.

Before she reached the door, however, Jane stepped into the fray, her starched white apron a flag of forced truce between mother and daughter, at least for the moment. Pale blonde hair crowned her head in a thick braid under her cap, and the roses in her cheeks bloomed bright whenever she sensed tension in a room.

Right now, they were flaming red.

“Telegram, mum,” she said, her Nottingham, England, accent flavoring her words. Jane had only arrived in New York two years ago, at the age of seventeen, and had been at the Waverly home ever since. “It’s from Albany.”

The women looked at each other in confusion before understanding registered on Alice’s face. “It must be Jacob. He’s there on business, but I don’t know what could be so important...” She snatched the envelope from its silver tray and ripped it open. No sooner had her eyes scanned the telegram than the paper fluttered to the floor. Her hands shook as she covered her trembling lips. Wide-eyed, Jane quietly left the room.

“He joined the Sixteenth New York Regiment,” Alice said, disbelief twisting the words. All color had drained from her face. “Signed up while he was in Albany. Can you believe that? He didn’t even ask me. He just did it.”

Caroline’s lips flattened into a thin, hard line. “Women ask permission from their husbands, dear, not the other way around.”

Hot moisture sprang to Charlotte’s eyes in sympathy as Alice choked on a sob.

Suddenly, the Civil War was not just a headline in the newspaper, a story from a distant land, neatly constrained to narrow columns of black and white typeface. With a single telegram, the war invaded their parlor and their lives. Now it was not just news. It was personal, in living color. And it was terrifying.

"When does he go?" Charlotte gently probed.

Blonde ringlets quivered as Alice shook her head. "I don't know. He just said he's coming home as planned but will be leaving again for training 'soon.' And what about me? I'll be all alone in that big house with just the servants!"

"You know you can stay here as long as you like," Caroline crooned.

"No," said Alice resolutely, looking suddenly years older. "My place is at home."

*Not this time*, thought Charlotte as she soothed her little sister. *You're coming with me*. She knew better than to say it aloud just yet.

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Once Alice was resting comfortably with a cup of tea, Charlotte made her way to the garden behind the house to clear her head. Dappled sunlight filtered through the trees and fell in a lacework pattern on the terraced garden. All the aromas of spring were sharpened in the rain-scrubbed air, lilac blossoms even more pungent than usual. Charlotte carefully perched on the cool stone bench and watched golden daffodils nod their heads in the breeze. Her hoop skirt formed a wide perimeter around her, as if to create a safe distance between her and the world.

When her gaze fell upon weeds crowding the tender shoots of Siberian irises, she felt an irresistible pull to pluck them out herself rather than wait for the gardener to do it. Kneeling on the ground, however, brought her no closer to her goal—yards of fabric and steel hoops were unavoidably in the way.

*Bother this contraption!* The only way to weed in a hoopskirt, Charlotte surmised, was to lie flat on her stomach and let the hoops flip the skirts straight up at a ridiculous ninety-degree angle to the ground. No,

that wouldn't do at all. With a quick glance around the stone wall-enclosed garden to confirm her privacy, she unfastened her skirt from her waist and bodice, stepped out of it and left it in a dejected pile next to the bench.

Unhindered at last, Charlotte knelt in her petticoats and buried her fingers in the soft, damp soil, relishing the musty smell and digging down deep to uproot the weeds that had taunted her a moment ago. She was so absorbed in her tiny patch of earth that she didn't hear the French doors to the garden unlatch.

"Why, Miss!" Jane gasped, quickly closing the door behind her. "What can you be thinking, down in the dirt, exposed like that for God and everybody!" She scurried to retrieve the discarded skirt.

Charlotte laughed. "It isn't like you haven't seen all of us in our petticoats before."

"No, Miss, true enough, but I'll bet your gentleman caller hasn't."

Charlotte gasped. Thoughtlessly, she brushed a strand of hair off her cheek, smudging the porcelain complexion that was the envy of her peers. "Mr. Hastings! I completely forgot." Charlotte stood, shook the dirt off her undergarments and allowed Jane to help her back into her skirt.

Rushing in from the garden, she ducked into the kitchen and scrubbed the evidence of her unladylike behavior from beneath her fingernails before approaching the tall, handsome visitor waiting in the front hall. One look at his tartan plaid trousers, dark green cravat, frock coat, and top hat told her he had a promenade in mind.

"Aha, so you've taken to painting, I see," he teased.

Charlotte's hands flew to her cheeks, still flushed from the cool May breeze. Indignation creased her face. She did not appreciate his innuendo that she used rouge—only women "on the town" painted their faces.

Mr. Hastings tilted his head and smiled down at her. "Oh, come now. No need to be cross. I think you look beautiful. So beautiful, in fact, that I'd like to show you off on the Broadway Promenade today. What do you

say?" His dark chocolate eyes captured hers, soft and inviting.

"Oh, my hair is a mess, I've been out in the garden," she hedged.

"I thought of that." Of course he had. His own jet black hair was smoothly in place, smelling faintly of pomade, his mustache and goatee neatly groomed, as ever. "Would you do me the honor of wearing this?" He picked up a box she hadn't noticed from the hall table.

"Why, Mr. Hastings—"

"Isn't it time you called me Phineas?"

She cleared her throat. "Phineas. I can't imagine what the occasion is." Hesitantly, she accepted the box from him.

"As the petals are the glory of the rose, the right attire is the glory of a woman," he said with a flourish.

Parting the tissue paper, Charlotte gently lifted out a pert straw hat trimmed with peacock plumes and a band of satin ribbon in a shocking shade of bright green.

"Well?" His voice was eager, expectant.

Charlotte skimmed a finger over the feathers. "It's quite . . . bright, isn't it?"

His low-pitched laughter rippled over her until she couldn't help but join in. "Yes, indeed. These new aniline dyes are the latest rage. No one will miss us."

That much was true. Charlotte managed a nod that she hoped appeared grateful, and excused herself to her dressing room to change into a deep indigo promenade gown with pagoda sleeves and a three-tiered skirt. She hoped it would tame down the peacock feathers in her hat.

Once on Broadway, Charlotte's unlikely ensemble blended into an eclectic crowd. Coats and dresses of all patterns swarmed around Phineas and Charlotte, the crowd a blur of bright eyes, whiskers, spectacles, hats, bonnets, and caps. Dandies passed by with their hornlike mustaches, kid gloves, thin trouser legs and patent leather shoes. Smartly dressed ladies in ribbons and silks stepped spritely out of shops, having done their part toward depleting their husbands' bank accounts with the finest Parisian fashions.

The daily afternoon “promenade” on Broadway had the sound of a leisurely stroll about it, but it was impossible to maintain anything less than a brisk pace to keep from getting run over. The booming city’s major thoroughfare was a profusion of color and a stimulus of excitement. It was hustle, bustle, and squeeze, like a dance of faltering steps to the offbeat tune of thundering omnibuses and the din of a crowd in a hurry. Charlotte would have preferred a stroll in Central Park, if not for the quieter atmosphere, for the fresher air. The musky scent of Phineas’s cologne was soon overpowered, and she was sure her mother and sister would smell on her clothing the horse manure of Broadway when she arrived home.

Phineas, Charlotte could tell, relished being caught in the whirl. His countenance always brightened around luxury and opulence, and here on Broadway, both were displayed en masse in the storefronts lining the avenue. Places like Lord & Taylor and Brooks Brothers usually caught his eye, but today he paused in front of Tiffany & Company, gazing at the dazzling ladies’ jewelry displayed on black velvet, with a firm hold on Charlotte’s small, gloved hand.

“Phineas.” Charlotte tugged gently on his arm. “Did you hear me? I said I’m going to apply to be a nurse.”

He swiveled around to face her. “Pardon me?”

“Yes, a nurse. The W.C.A.R. means to train one hundred New York women to serve as nurses for the army—they army doesn’t have enough, you know—and I mean to be one of them.”

His brow furrowed. “But how would that look?”

“Patriotic,” she said, a little too quickly. “Dutiful. Benevolent. Respectable, too.”

“Just how would it be respectable to have women mixing with large masses of half-naked men?”

“Phineas, listen to me. The most respectable women—and men—of our class are behind this. Reverend Henry Bellows, Dr. Elisah Harris, Mrs. David Dudley Field, Mrs. Henry Baylis, Mrs. Cyrus Field, Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell . . . all of them.” When he still looked unconvinced,

she continued. "The army is simply unprepared to handle the magnitude of what is about to unfold on the battlefields. Why not use women who are willing, able, and most eager to serve? Think of it this way. When a doctor or surgeon makes a house call, who takes care of the sick or wounded when the doctor leaves?" She paused. "The women do. The mothers, wives, sisters, sometimes even daughters receive instructions from the doctor or surgeon, clean and dress the wounds, administer the medicines. We are already nurses. This is just moving it to a different setting. Not every soldier's mother or wife will be able to tend their own. Only a select few will fill that role—but we must have training. Do you see?"

"I don't like it. I'm afraid most people won't think about it in the same way. But if you insist on being stubborn about it . . ."

"It is what I want." She pinned him with a determined look. She didn't really need his permission.

Suddenly, a woman in a bright green gown, too low in the neckline for daytime wear, and with a bonnet pushed too far back on her head, sauntered past, leaving behind her a trail of lilac scent so thick Charlotte could taste it.

Charlotte followed Phineas's gaze in time to see the woman look back over her shoulder and throw him a brazen wink and a smile as bold—and sickening—as the heavy fragrance in which she was drenched. Her cheeks were painted. In a flash, Phineas's face flamed just as red, but playing around the corners of his mouth was just the hint of a smile.



## Chapter Four

Tuesday, April 30, 1861

None of it seemed real to Ruby O'Flannery. The noise was deafening, the glaring sun unfriendly to her weak green eyes. Far more used to shadows, she felt as though she had just stepped into a scene in an overexposed photograph. Thousands of people lined the sidewalks, pushed against windows or streamed out of doors all along the road. New York City's Sixty-ninth Regiment was marching in full uniform to attend Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral on Mott Street for a blessing from Archbishop John Hughes. It would be the company's last stop before departing for war. Flags of emerald green fringed with gold, the Irish regiment colors, dotted the churning sea of people. The crush of the unruly crowd frightened Ruby; hundreds were attempting to march alongside the soldiers. She had already lost sight of her husband, Matthew, just one bobbing black felt slouch hat among one thousand others.

When Lincoln had called for volunteers to defend the Union, thou-

sands had rushed to respond. Recruiting posters aimed at Irish immigrants told them their American service would function as militia training that could be used against the English one day. Many Irish, like Matthew, were drawn to the regular paycheck they could send home to their near-destitute families. Whatever the motives for joining the volunteer forces, the Sixty-ninth Regiment helped dispel the common perception that Irish-Catholic immigrants were unpatriotic and disloyal to their new country.

The tune of the bugles and the steady beat of the drums changed pitch in Ruby's ears as her stooped figure was swept farther and farther away from the marching regiment by the surging throngs of spectators. She could hardly comprehend that so many people suddenly supported what Matthew was doing. She was used to jeers, not cheers.

Ruby and Matthew had arrived at the Port of New York in 1850 at the crest of the mass migration to escape Ireland's Great Famine. While they saw New York as a new beginning, New Yorkers made it clear that the O'Flannerys, along with the thousands of other immigrants who arrived that year, were unwelcome, posting signs on their storefronts reading "IRISH NEED NOT APPLY."

Now, with the joyful shouts of the masses and the steady rhythm of the marching Sixty-ninth ringing in her ears, Ruby dared to hope Matthew's new opportunity and its guaranteed salary was the answer she had been praying for.

Unable to find a spot inside the cathedral, Ruby leaned against the brick wall enclosing the adjacent cemetery outside and smoothed her dark red hair back into place in a tightly coiled bun. The petite woman had been beautiful once, her parents even naming her for the striking color of her hair. But that was a lifetime ago.

"Hey, hunchback!"

Ruby didn't need to look around to know the brazen child was talking to her. It was true. As an outworker seamstress, unending hours spent bending over her sewing in the poorly lit rooms of her tenement cramped her back and neck muscles so much that she was stooped over

even when not working. Her neck bent forward, giving her the appearance either of being in a great hurry when walking or greatly attentive when in conversation.

A ripple of laughter told her that a gaggle of young boys had singled her out as the object of their attention.

“C’mon now, and show us yer arms, tweety!” another boy taunted.

Arms already folded across her chest, she dug her fingers into them as if to keep them from flying up by accident. Like any other hand sewer, her arms had been so trained by holding work up to her eyes that their natural resting position was to bend up from the elbows. The cruel nickname “tweety,” she assumed, was based on her hideous resemblance to a bird with broken wings. She made it a habit to carry something in her arms while walking in public to disguise their unnatural bend. Caught empty-handed, she would fold her arms across her chest or prop her fists on her hips, rather than straighten her elbows, which caused great pain.

From around the corner, a Sister of Charity came and shooed the boys away on threat of putting them in the nuns’ Orphan Asylum. It would have been a step up for the boys’ living conditions, but they scattered anyway.

“Are you all right, my child?” the nun asked Ruby. “Pay those lads no mind. They come from hard homes, you know, with little but the clothes on their backs. You can’t imagine the filth and vermin that share those dark, cramped quarters with them.” Ruby nodded. She understood more than the nun realized. Those boys were her neighbors at the tenement.

“I’m all right, Sister. Just waiting to see if I can catch a glimpse of my husband before he sets off.” Ruby kept her arms crossed. The kind nun nodded and returned to her duties. Taking a deep breath, Ruby lifted her face to the sun. The warmth felt good after another long hard winter. Spring had come again, when she felt like it never would. Of course, this spring was different—this spring had brought with it a war that seemed so far away, but whose fingers had reached up to her city and grasped her neighbors and husband in its mighty grip, pulling them

away from her. But the war machine also paid money, for which she was grateful. It had to be wrong to find hope in any aspect of war, but Matthew's steady income would allow her a respite from the life-draining hours she had been forced to keep lately.

An hour later, the Sixty-ninth spilled out the front doors and began their march directly to the ferry that would take them to Annapolis for their first mission of guard duty. Ruby scanned the uniformed men for a final glimpse of her husband.

The crowd continued to push past her, almost knocking her down. A strong grip on her shoulder spun her around.

"Don't you have any work to do?" Matthew suddenly stood over her. His brawny form, the evidence of long hours spent building bridges and hauling rocks, stretched the fibers of his ill-fitting Union greatcoat. His blue eyes flashed with their usual intensity, his ruddy cheeks flushed with both anticipation of war and the heat of the packed sanctuary he had just come from.

His absurd question stung Ruby as much as his drunken slaps. She usually worked fifteen hours a day from their dank tenement dwelling, sewing cuffs, buttonholes, and sleeves of bleached muslin for Davis & Company, but work always surged in April as the garment manufacturer rushed summer styles to Western and Southern suppliers. She could easily count on eighteen hours most days this month, earning her between seventy-five cents and a dollar fifty per week. She knew exactly how much work awaited her and needed no reminding.

"Can't a woman see her husband off to war?" Ruby replied. A rash of heat radiated from her collar to her chin.

Matthew shook his head. "Soon's I get my paycheck, I'll be sending it on home to you, but in the meantime, you are supporting yourself."

Time and pain had chipped away the luxury of common courtesy and kindness, but Ruby knew he wouldn't let his wife go hungry if he could help it.

"This is a new start for us, Ruby." His voice was edged with determination.

And then he was gone, as suddenly as he had appeared, lost again in the formation of soldiers filing down the street on their way to the ferry.

Ruby stood frozen in place. Something about his farewell haunted her. “A new start,” he had said. Yes, that was it. That’s what he had said when they immigrated to New York, and yet they had still struggled, just in new ways, to survive. That’s what he had said when they learned they were going to have a child, both times, and now they had none. Was she still a mother if her children were dead? She pressed calloused and pinpricked fingertips against her eyelids, as if she could close her mind’s eye to the horrific images her memory now dredged up. She needed to sit down.

Turning against the crowd, Ruby fought her way back to St. Patrick’s Cathedral and stepped through the two sets of massive double doors leading to the sanctuary. As the muffled din of the retreating crowd faded, she sank down into the last pew. Her slight shoulders shook with silent sobs that racked her entire body.

Spent at last, she looked up. Stained glass windows on the sides of the church depicted stories from the Bible, while the windows at the front of the nave cast the light in shades of blue and green. Thick, red carpeting created a path from the middle aisle up the stone steps to where the archbishop had said mass a short time ago. The ceiling was so tall her gaze followed it up until it pointed her to the heavens.

Rarely was she in a place this magnificent. Catholic churches, like Catholic immigrants, faced hard times in New York City, too, prompting them to charge an admission fee to enter, and to rent the front pews to the upper- and middle-class as another marker of their wealth. Ruby had been told that the brick wall enclosing the Cathedral and cemetery was to prevent mob violence from anti-Catholics, but she had always thought of it as yet another barrier between her and God.

Today, however, she relished being surrounded by such opulence. She felt like she should pray, but all she knew from her childhood was the Hail Mary. “Hail Mary, full of grace,” she started, slipping to her

knees and gently rocking back and forth as she had done as a girl. “The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.”

*Now, and at the hour of our death*, Ruby repeated to herself. *The hour of our death*.

Was it only supposed to take an hour? Just one moment, just one death? For when each of her children had passed from this life, they took pieces of hers with them, leaving her with half a heart and a life never to be fulfilled.

Ruby’s gaze settled on a sculpture of Mary holding Jesus—not the newborn baby, but the lifeless body of God the Son, just pulled down from the cross. Tears rolled down Ruby’s cheeks unbidden as she stared at Mary’s stony face. She had come here in search of peace but felt only pain instead.

She hurried from the cathedral and made her way back to the tenement. For once, she was grateful to be able to turn her attention to the work that awaited her.



## Chapter Five

Sunday, May 4, 1861

By the end of the week, Alice was home again at her tranquil estate in Fishkill, seventy miles north of Manhattan, and Jacob was back at her side. For the moment, Charlotte could picture her sister knitting and sewing far into the night to outfit her soldier husband for war.

*And what am I doing? Dancing at a ball to honor the newest debutante of society. As if there was nothing better to do.* The thought pinched her as much as the whalebone corset cinching her waist to a mere fifteen inches.

She trained her eyes on her dance partner as they twirled through a sea of taffeta and coattails. In the edges of her vision, the room spun in a sparkling, pastel blur of opulence. Charlotte's feet kept time to the polka, but her heart beat to a reveille.

When horsehair bows finally stopped dancing on their strings, the men bowed and women dipped in low curtsies before being handed to the next partner listed on their dance cards.

"You are as lovely as ever." Phineas's mustache tickled her cheek as he spoke into her ear, sending a shiver down her spine. She wore an off-the-shoulder gown of soft white organdy, adorned with a cluster of butterfly roses made of silk ribbon in the center of the bodice, and more roses cascading down the multitiered skirt. Her chestnut hair was swept up and crowned with a band of green leaves and a bunch of roses covering the thick knot at the nape of her neck. "You look like an angel in that exquisite gown."

"I'd rather look like a nurse and do something useful for once," she murmured, sure no one could hear her anyway. Phineas walked Charlotte back to her mother and returned to the dance floor to complete a set of eight dancers for the quadrille, without her. Though Caroline sniffed at the empty slot on her daughter's card, Charlotte was content to rest and watch the mesmerizing movements on the gleaming hardwood floor.

"Charlie?"

That voice, so warm and comforting. The faint scent of balsam shaving soap. The name—no one had called her that for years. Not since—

"Caleb! I mean, Dr. Lansing, what a—surprise," she sputtered as her heart constricted in her chest. The mustache was new since she had seen him last, and so was the trace of laugh lines framing his face. But the clear grey eyes were exactly the same. Soft as goose down and piercing as steel, all at once. "I didn't know you'd be here."

His face relaxed into a smile. "Me neither," he admitted, offering her a cup of lemonade as if seeing each other again were the most natural thing in the world. As if a decade of silence between them made no difference whatsoever. "I'm just in town for some lectures on anesthesia at Bellevue Hospital this week. Two of the other doctors at Bellevue were invited to attend this evening but one of them had to bow out when a patient began bleeding after surgery."

Charlotte held up her hand and closed her eyes. "No details, please." Even the mention of blood was enough to make her stomach roil.

"I wouldn't dream of it. Anyway, having no other pressing engagements, I agreed to take his place and come along with Dr. Shearling—that fellow over there jamming too much cake into his mouth. Can't have an uneven number of partners at a ball, you know. Disastrous." He winked, detonating a blast of heat across her face.

Mercifully, Caleb turned to greet Caroline while Charlotte hid her burning cheeks behind her cup of lemonade. It was both sour and sweet on her tongue, but quenched a thirst she only just realized she had. *Like Caleb*. Charlotte nearly choked on the unbidden notion, and resolutely swallowed it along with the cool drink. She couldn't think this way. It was over. She had a suitor. This was crazy.

"Caleb, it's so good to see you," Caroline was saying, kissing both of his cheeks. "Your practice is going well in Connecticut?"

He nodded. "It keeps me so busy I'm afraid I haven't much time for anything else."

Charlotte stole a glance at the fourth finger of his left hand. Still bare. Strange. She thought he'd be married by now. He must be thirty-two-years old. But then, she wasn't much younger, and still being chaperoned by her mother. Did he think she was a hopeless spinster? Embarrassment warmed her cheeks. Again.

Caleb sipped his lemonade and turned to watch the quadrille dancers.

"Not feeling up to this one?" he asked her, pointing with his cup.

Charlotte shook her head and willed her voice to sound normal. "Group dances make me nervous. It looks lovely from a distance, but when I'm part of it, I can't help daydreaming about what would happen if I missed a step—or worse, did the wrong step."

"You do realize that most people aren't looking at your feet—can't see them anyway under all those yards of fabric," said Caleb. "They are looking into those caramel-colored eyes of yours." He held her in his gaze for a long moment, his eyes suddenly soft.

"But if I go the wrong direction, no matter where they look, it

throws everybody off. Would we all topple into one great heap? How would I recover from that?"

Caroline turned to face her daughter now. "What on earth are you talking about, child? Go the wrong direction? You were trained in all the dances. Why would you be worried about making a misstep?"

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The quadrille music ended, and Caleb took the lemonade cup from Charlotte's hand, placing both his and hers on a nearby table stacked with mounds of small cakes. Not bothering to check her dance card, he placed a hand on the small of her back and guided her onto the floor, his pulse pounding harder with every step.

"Couple dances are more fun than group dances, aren't they, Charlotte?" Caleb kept his tone casual, but his racing heart was not convinced.

As the instruments struck the first few notes of the waltz, Caleb encircled her tiny waist with his right arm and held her right hand in his left. An electric shock coursed through his body at the closeness of her. How many times had he dreamed of this moment? He could barely believe he was holding her again, even if it was at arm's length and not in an embrace.

The music began, and so did their feet. *One-two-three and one-two-three and one-two-three*. His eyes never left her face. He had always thought her beautiful, and had always admired her resilient, compassionate spirit. Now, as a grown woman, she nearly took his breath away. Those luminous eyes, the glowing skin, the full lips forming the bow of Cupid himself. *How in heaven's name is she not yet some lucky man's wife?*

"Am I making anyone jealous?" The question escaped his lips before he could bite back his curiosity.

She peered up at him from under dark, long lashes. "I doubt it."

"Don't be so sure, Charlotte. You don't know the effect you have over a man's heart." His voice turned husky without his permission. He jerked his gaze away from her questioning eyes and struggled to mask

the emotion written on his face. But he could not escape the scent of her. The faint fragrance of lemons and rosewater washed over him, and he drank it in. Vivid memories flooded his mind before he could snap back to the present moment.

*One-two-three and one-two-three and*—“Well, Phineas Hastings signed up for his two dances of the evening already. I’ll be dancing with him again next.” She pinned her gaze to his shoulder as she spoke.

“Is he the best partner for you?”

“He’s the one I came here with.”

“That doesn’t answer my question. If you make a misstep, step on his toes, if you go the ‘wrong’ direction, what would he do?”

“Well, he would steer me back to the right way and try to keep leading, I suppose.” Her voice was laced with uncertainty.

“What if your stepping out of formation was actually a step in the right direction? What a shame it would be if you were always confined to a prescribed number and pattern of steps.”

Charlotte tilted her head up at him, confusion written on her face. He went on. “Don’t you think that instead of yanking you back into place, the right partner would step out *with* you?” He drew her closer—perhaps too close. But he didn’t care. And she didn’t fight it. He bent his head and spoke softly in her ear. “Daring to believe that another dance, a different dance, could be just as elegant—or even more so?”

Charlotte pulled back just far enough to search his eyes, her breathing rapid and shallow.

*One-two-three and one-two-three and one-two-three and one-two-three and*—“Don’t lead Mr. Hastings on if he isn’t the right one for you,” Caleb whispered, and the music tapered to a close. “For his sake, and for yours.”

Bowing, he pressed his lips to her hand. *And for mine.*

Charlotte curtsied. They both stood tall again.

“I go back to Connecticut tomorrow.” He thrust his hands, still tingling from holding her, into his pockets. “And from there, to wherever Uncle Sam sends me.”

“You’re joining then? To fight?”

“I will be one of Lincoln’s seventy-five thousand, but not to fight. To heal. Those soldiers need doctors. It’s my duty to help, the least I can do for my country. The Pied Piper is calling, and come what may, I’m on way.”

Charlotte stiffened, a sheen of tears glazing her eyes. Gold flecks in her eyes brightened, as they always did when she was either very happy or very upset. And she wasn’t happy. But was she sad? Afraid? Angry?

“Charlie, I—”

A gentleman with jet black hair and mustache was walking toward them now, most likely to claim the next dance on her card. *Phineas?* Caleb squeezed her hands, said, “Write to me,” and walked away.

Raking a hand through his straw-colored hair, Caleb walked back to the refreshments table, completely uninterested in dancing with anyone else.

“Lansing, old chap!” Dr. Shearling was still eating. “Why on earth did you let that marvelous creature go?” He pointed to Charlotte, now dancing in the arms of another man.

A rueful smile played on Caleb’s lips. “Believe me, Shearling, I regret it already.”

*I always have.*