

A woman with blonde hair styled in an updo is shown in profile, looking down. She is wearing a blue lace dress and a multi-strand pearl necklace. The background is a soft, textured grey.

"Lovers of Civil War fiction will rejoice."

JOCELYN GREEN

Award-winning author of the *Heroines Behind the Lines* Civil War series

a novel

Engraved
on the **HEART**



TARA JOHNSON

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“A truly lovely debut novel. [Told] through the eyes of an unlikely heroine awakening to the injustices of slavery, *Engraved on the Heart* brings Savannah, Georgia, during the Civil War to life. Tara Johnson writes with honesty and compassion, undergirded with solid research. The characters are lovingly drawn, and Keziah’s growth from sheltered weakness to faithful courage is simply radiant. A book to savor and an author to watch!”

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Civil War fiction will rejoice to add *Engraved on the Heart* to their collections. I'll be looking for more from Tara Johnson!"

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MAGGIE HOME*

"Tara Johnson delivers a stirring tale of danger and hope in *Engraved on the Heart*. I was invested in Micah and Kizzie's love story from the very first chapter—and fell more than a little in love with Micah myself."

ROBIN LEE HATCHER, RITA AND CHRISTY AWARD-
WINNING AUTHOR OF *YOU'LL THINK OF ME* AND *YOU'RE
GONNA LOVE ME*

ENGRAVED ON THE HEART





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on the *HEART*



TARA JOHNSON



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CHAPTER 1



APRIL 12, 1861

SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

Don't fail. Tonight of all nights, don't fail.

Keziah Montgomery placed her gloved fingers into the waiting hand of the man smiling at her with confident expectation.

Taking a shallow breath against the corset threatening to crush her ribs in its unyielding grip, she willed her fluttering stomach to calm and allowed Mr. Watson to lead her onto the crowded dance floor. A colorful array of bright silks and lace flurried around her in circles. The thick, sticky air carried the weight of pomade and a nauseating mixture of shaving soaps and rice powder. The din of chatter and polite laughter choked her dizzying thoughts.

From across the room, she caught Mother's penetrating stare. Elsie Montgomery had been adamant Keziah be at her best. No one must know her shameful secret. The sooner she marry, the better . . . before her future husband realized what her parents were so desperate to keep hidden.

Looking up, she smiled into the youthful face of Tate Watson as he cupped his warm hand against her waist, keeping the proper distance between them as the musicians struck up the opening strains of "The Scenes of Our Childhood." She noted the golden stubble lining his jaw, his brown eyes bright. A flush of heat crept up her neck.

She blinked away the grit filming her vision. It was late into the festivities and the night seemed to drag. Still, she maintained her pasted-on smile and allowed him to sweep her through the whirling couples and blurring faces. If only it weren't so warm.

Mr. Watson's lips moved, but it took her several moments to focus on what he was saying. "Are you enjoying the ball?"

"Yes. The Ballingers throw an exquisite party."

"Indeed, although I fear all the talk of impending war may have dampened the festivities to a degree."

She nodded demurely, though she'd never admit conversing about the possibility of war was far more interesting than being forced to make polite niceties to the elite of Savannah's upper echelon. Her mother would faint if she allowed her tongue to spill the unladylike sentiment.

"If war is declared, will you go?"

His eyes glinted, his bearing stiff as he circled her past

potted palms, pulling her into the thick of the dancers. “Without hesitation. It’s my sacred calling and duty to defend the freedoms Mr. Lincoln is attempting to rip from our way of life. No man worth his salt would dare flee his duty.”

Keziah pressed her lips tight, unwilling to say anything further, knowing if she did, she would be unable to stop. The issues did not seem so starkly cut to her. Instead, she smiled and nodded again, praying her mother could understand the depths of her desire to please. Keziah would not mortify her. Not again.

The room suddenly dipped and twisted. Her breath thinned. *Stay upright. Focus.* Blinking hard, she realized Mr. Watson was asking her something, though she didn’t understand what. Alarm flooded her, followed by a frisson of something indefinable tingling up her spine.

No, God. Please, no. Not here. What will Mother think?

The prayer had hardly crossed her thoughts before she plunged into the abyss, the spinning colors collapsing into merciful blackness.



Micah Greyson scoured the crowded ballroom as he sipped the too-sweet punch. He didn’t belong.

Since returning home to Savannah from medical school in Philadelphia, he felt distant, removed. He had thought to open a practice and wanted to live near Mother. He owed her much. But now? He couldn’t shake the unease gnawing his middle. The feeling was odd and altogether unsettling. Not

just because there were new faces, nor because old classmates and neighbors had moved away. This was something else. As if society's values were different. The perspective on human life and dignity had altered.

No, Savannah hadn't changed. It was him. Too many abolitionist rallies. He'd seen and heard far too much to leave Philadelphia unchanged and unaffected. He felt as if he'd just awakened from a long, hazy dream, suddenly aware of how different life could be, only to find himself sucked back into the foggy nightmare once more.

And what to do with the knowledge of who he was in the midst of it all? He would never belong. Could never belong again.

He took another pull of his punch, rolling the syrupy taste of cherries over his tongue, and sighed. Some men feared death; others feared losing their loved ones. His fear was entirely different. He must not grow callous and indifferent to the plight of those suffering around him.

The raucous laughter of a man to his left grated his nerves. Placing the half-empty glass on a tray with a soft clink, he scowled. It was a mistake to have come. He'd only done so at his friend's pleading. Oliver was bursting to talk war with the other men, not to mention dance with the young debutantes. His friend could be quite convincing. But Micah was charmed by none of it. The music seemed at odds with his mood, the air too suffocating.

He had turned to make his apologies to the hostess when

a muffled cry rang out from the cluster of dancers clogging the floor. A male voice shouted amid the din.

“Is there a physician here?”

He stepped forward, eyeing the crush of people who had stopped moving. They swarmed around someone who had fallen. Man or woman? He couldn't tell. There was too much commotion. Too many people.

He shouted, “I'm a physician! Make way.”

The crowd parted slowly to reveal a young man leaning over an unconscious woman crumpled on the glistening waxed floor. Pushing past the mob, he frowned.

“Please, give the poor woman some air.”

As he knelt down to assess her condition, he sucked in a breath at the lovely form tangled in a swirl of blue silk, observing the way her fingers twitched sporadically, the soft muscles of her throat knotting as her head thrashed. His gaze landed on her face and his heart gave an odd lurch.

He couldn't believe it. After all these years. He cradled her head gently, stroking the soft skin of her cheek, and prayed.

Kizzie Montgomery.

Micah tugged Kizzie's slight weight closer to his chest as he struggled to carry her up the stairs of the Ballinger mansion, her voluminous skirts and hoops making his progress difficult. The murmurs of shock rippling through the room faded away as he followed the hostess to a guest bedroom.

“Here. This room should serve.”

Mrs. Ballinger pushed aside the heavy door and hastened

to light a lamp as he laid Kizzie on the green-and-gold brocade-covered bed. He pressed his fingers to her slender neck, monitoring the thrum of her pulse. Steady.

“How can I be of help?” The concerned matron twisted her hands, looking out of place as a nursemaid in her glittering beads and filmy lavender gown. Lines deepened around her eyes.

“Could I trouble you for some clean cloths and a pitcher of cool water?”

With a nod, she breathed, “Of course. I’ll send Minnie up straightaway.”

“Thank you.”

He smoothed Kizzie’s strawberry-blonde curls away from her temples, her skin pale but warm. A slight spray of freckles on her delicate nose stood out in stark contrast to her creamy skin. She seemed to be sleeping peacefully. No more twitches or convulsions.

“Doctor, may I be so bold as to ask—” the hostess swallowed, still lingering in the room—“what malady has befallen this woman?”

Easing one of Kizzie’s eyelids open, he nodded in satisfaction when the pupil in the center of her eye shrank against the light of the lamp. “I won’t be sure until I’ve examined her more thoroughly, but I believe she’s had an epileptic attack.”

Mrs. Ballinger clucked her tongue. “The falling sickness.”

“Yes, I believe so.”

The poised woman held herself aloof as if unsure what to do. “Well, I’ll fetch Minnie. She should be up shortly.”

Micah barely heard himself murmur a response before leaning over Kizzie once more, admiring her long lashes, high cheekbones, and full lips. She was more beautiful than he remembered.

Beautiful and unconscious.

Troubled, he took her pulse again. Steady.

His breath froze when he saw her eyelids twitch, her lashes fluttering before her eyes opened, the walnut-and-cinnamon colors he remembered flaming to life yet filled with confusion. Her fingers roved over the silk of her bodice until he captured them between his own. He smiled and tried to keep his voice soft and calm, aware that she would be unlikely to remember this moment tomorrow.

“Kizzie, it’s Micah Greyson. Do you remember me?”

She blinked and licked her lips. “Micah? From school?”

Nodding, he smiled. “From school.”

Her chest rose and fell, her gaze flickering across his face. “What happened? Where am I?”

Micah squeezed her fingers, kept his voice soothing. “You’re at the Ballinger house. You were dancing and collapsed.”

Her eyes widened as a shadow of awareness crept over her face. “Was it . . . ?” She choked against the words forming. This had happened to her before.

“Yes. Epileptic attack.”

She looked away. Her chin trembled. “Leave me, please.”

“I’m a physician now. Please let me help you.”

“There’s nothing you can do. No one can.”

“That’s not true. Why, just last ye—”

She sucked in a tight breath. “No. Mother. She must have seen it.” With a groan, she squeezed her eyes shut but did not release his hand. “She’ll be mortified.”

Micah frowned. “You can’t help what happened.”

Kizzie focused on his face, a sadness flickering in her expression. “My parents believe differently.”

Cruel. Ignorant. Shaming their daughter for an ailment she had no control over? He ground his teeth as she relaxed against the soft down of the bed. Her eyelids drooped.

A murmur escaped her. “So tired.”

“That’s normal. Rest. I’ll be right here.”

Eyes sliding shut, she sighed softly, causing his heart to give an odd fillip. “Thank you . . . Micah . . .”

Asleep.

A raucous shout shook the floor under his feet. The crowd downstairs yelled and whooped. The glass globe of the oil lamp rattled. What was happening?

As the tumult below settled into a humming din, he watched the gentle rise and fall of her breath beneath her limp hand. Who could have imagined he’d run into her here, his first social gathering since returning? The one girl who’d managed to capture his heart as a boy.

Not that she would ever know. He wouldn’t tell her. Couldn’t tell anyone. They could never be together. He’d thought by now, with distance and the passing of time, the youthful feelings would have abated, but seeing her again

had caused every old memory, every one of her sweet smiles, every dream, to roar back to life with frightening speed.

The bedroom door squeaked open as a petite woman with graying blonde hair and a stricken expression crossed the threshold.

He straightened, releasing Kizzie's hand. "Dr. Micah Greyson, ma'am."

Rushing to her side, the matron leaned over Kizzie and stroked her forehead before glancing toward him as if he were little more than a nuisance.

"Elsie Montgomery. I'm Keziah's mother. It took me several minutes to escape the melee."

"I heard the shouts. What happened?"

She straightened, her face somber.

"What we've known was imminent, Dr. Greyson. Fortunately for my daughter, her . . . *illness*—" Micah noted the distaste that pinched Mrs. Montgomery's mouth—"is the least of everyone's concern now."

"Why?"

Sighing deeply, the older woman furrowed her brow into deep lines. "War, Doctor. War has begun."