



a novel

WHERE
Dandelions
BLOOM

*Disguising herself as a Yankee soldier
might be her only path to freedom.*

TARA JOHNSON

Praise for Tara Johnson



“Bringing facets of Civil War history to life, *Where Dandelions Bloom* is an engaging journey of hidden identity and of discovering what’s most important in life—and in love. A story certain to delight fans of historical romance!”

TAMERA ALEXANDER, *USA TODAY* BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
CHRISTMAS AT CARNTON AND *A NOTE YET UNSUNG*

“In her sparkling debut . . . Johnson crafts an inspirational tale of love, fortitude, and what it means to do the right thing when the very concept of ‘right’ is challenged.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY, STARRED REVIEW

“A timeless and timely theme of helping persecuted people blooms into an unusual Civil War romance that explores Keziah’s search for a purpose, the intersection of faith and practice, and how single acts have far-reaching effects.

FOREWORD REVIEWS

“Debut novelist Johnson does not shy away from the horrors of slavery and the important role of the Underground Railroad, but the tone of this historical romance is much lighter than expected. . . . Fans of the genre will be pleased.”

LIBRARY JOURNAL

“Keziah and Micah brave danger and death to help slaves journey to freedom, reminding readers that choosing right often involves great sacrifice.”

CBA *CHRISTIAN MARKET*

“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!”

SARAH SUNDIN, AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR OF *THE SEA BEFORE US* AND THE WAVES OF FREEDOM SERIES

“Set amid the beauty of Savannah, Georgia, at the onset of the Civil War, *Engraved on the Heart* is a story that is as spiritually profound as it is romantic, its heroine as memorable and unique as her lovely name. Johnson weaves a tale of secrets, selflessness, and service where love and truth triumph. A remarkable, memorable debut!”

LAURA FRANTZ, AUTHOR OF *THE LACEMAKER*

“Through the eyes of pop-off-the-page characters, readers are whisked into turbulent Confederate Savannah, from charming balls to the intrigue and danger of the Underground Railroad. Woven throughout this vibrant tale are strong spiritual threads sure to inspire. Lovers of Civil War fiction will rejoice to add *Engraved on the Heart* to their collections. I’ll be looking for more from Tara Johnson!”

JOCELYN GREEN, AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR OF THE HEROINES BEHIND THE LINES CIVIL WAR SERIES

“Blending realistic, relatable characters and the heartrending issue of slavery against a beautifully painted backdrop, Tara Johnson presents a debut novel that will leave you satisfied and yet still wanting more. Both major issues—living with an uncontrollable health issue and being trapped in servitude—could become oppressive or maudlin, but Johnson expertly handles both and weaves them so intricately into the story’s fabric that a beautiful tapestry of overcoming hardship and experiencing freedom emerges. I highly recommend this engaging and intriguing historical novel.”

KIM VOGEL SAWYER, BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *BRINGING 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*

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TARA JOHNSON



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Prologue

JUNE 4, 1851

NEW YORK CITY

Gabriel Avery hit the unforgiving pavement with a grunt. Above him, the thin, dirty faces of his foes looked down on him with sneers.

“Give it up, Avery.”

A kick to his middle caused him to fold his body inward as he clutched his burning stomach. “I’ve not a penny to give you.”

A few more blows to his back and legs before the oldest of the boys heaved an impatient sigh. “Come on. He ain’t got nothin’.”

Their shuffling scrapes faded from the bottle-littered alley. Gabe sat up with a groan but couldn’t suppress a smile of victory. Hiding the nickel inside his shoe had worked. They’d always discovered the coinage in his pockets, but he’d finally found a spot safe from their eager hands.

Rising, he swiped at the dirt clinging to his trousers. Mither would scold him hard if he were to put another tear in them.

Clothing came dear, and Da was working long enough hours as it was. They could ill afford to buy new clothes. It was difficult enough for Scottish immigrants in New York without adding clumsiness and neighborhood bullies to the list of living expenses.

Gabe sighed. The slums gobbled up more and more of the city. With their encroaching darkness came more trouble-makers. More boys wanting to scrap, and fewer places he could go to be left in peace.

The odor of rotting cabbage, urine, and musty newspapers thickened the air. A door in the alley creaked open just before the contents of a chamber pot were thrown onto the uneven stones with a splatter. Gabe winced and took a step backward.

Mr. Giuseppe scowled. "I don't want any street rats hanging around."

"I'll not trouble you. I'm passing by."

The barrel-chested Italian narrowed his dark eyes to slits. "See you do, or my aim will be better next time."

Mr. Giuseppe meant it too. The hot-tempered man had done more than bluff in the past. Gabe wasted no time scampering from the alley. Cramming his hands into his pockets, he burst onto the crowded sidewalk, thankful for the sunshine despite the sweat trickling down his back. He shuffled through the teeming mass of people scurrying to their various destinations—work, appointments, restaurants—when a shop window captured his attention.

A new business inhabited the old abandoned bakery. The formerly empty glass front that had boasted nothing more than spiderwebs was now filled with pictures of every size. Black-and-white faces stared back at him. Mothers and children, proud military leaders, a boy with his dog, an elderly couple leaning against the porch of their farmhouse . . . every framed portrait was more captivating than the last. Curling his fingers

against the glass, Gabe pressed in for a better view as the crowds around him melted away.

“Do you like what you see, lad?”

Gabe startled and looked up to find a man with a handlebar mustache smiling at him. His blue eyes danced.

“I’ve never seen such wonderful pictures before. Each one is like a story.”

“Well said.” The lean fellow knelt until they were eye level and studied the images.

“How are they created?”

“It’s called daguerreotype. You’ve heard of cameras before?”

“Yes, sir.”

The man nodded. “Good. Well, a daguerreotypist takes a sheet of silver-plated copper, exposes it to the light of a camera lens, and uses mercury vapor on it. After that, other chemicals are applied before it’s sealed behind glass. Whatever image was captured by the camera lens remains forever.”

“It’s . . . wonderful.” Gabe drank in the sight of the little boy with his arm slung around his dog as they stood watch on a rough-hewn log porch. Surely that boy didn’t have to fight off hordes of pickpockets and greedy tormentors each day. He must not deal with the stench of a cramped city constantly swelling ever larger, or watch his mother and father scrimp and save for the smallest pittance of comfort. Did his ceiling leak when it rained? Was his da too exhausted each evening to play with him?

This daguerreotype must be a sort of magic in its own way. Still moments of perfection in happy lives. Something yawned wide in Gabe’s chest. “I want to learn.”

The man rose and placed a hand on his shoulder. “My name is Franklin Adams, and this is my shop. Come inside. I’ll show you how it’s done.”

Chapter 1



TEN YEARS LATER

APRIL 12, 1861

HOWELL, MICHIGAN

“Cassandra Kendrick! What have you done?”

Cassie cringed at the slurred, booming voice hovering just beyond the barn door. She crouched, pressing her back against the prickly wood wall, and breathed through her mouth lest the sweet motes of hay floating around her cause a sneeze. She could not let Father know her whereabouts. Not until his temper cooled or his alcohol-sodden brain plunged him once again into a sleeping stupor. For him to find her in his current condition would not bode well.

In her eighteen years, history had taught her that much in abundance.

“Come out, come out, wherever you are.”

The ominous timbre slithered down her spine. She squeezed her eyes shut.

Thud, thud, thud.

Her pulse pounded dully in her ears, the rhythm far too rapid. Could he hear?

His sluggish footsteps faded, as did his familiar curses. She allowed her back to relax a fraction and dropped her head against the barn wall, wincing when strands of her hair stuck and pulled against the splinters of wood.

Breathe in; breathe out.

She waited for several long moments. He had deceived her before. She had crept from her hiding spot only to have his meaty fingers clamp around her throat.

The barn door squeaked open on rusty hinges. Her breath snagged, but it was Mother's careworn face that appeared. Sunlight streamed around her silhouette.

"He's gone."

Uttering a sigh of relief, Cassie pushed away from the wall and brushed poking shafts of straw from her skirt. "He found out, then?"

Mother nodded. "Came from town and went straight to the crock."

Cassie grimaced, imagining his reaction when his calloused fingers scraped the inside of the empty container. "He didn't accuse you, did he?"

Mother waved her hand in dismissal, though the tight lines around her eyes remained. "It doesn't matter. He laid not a hand on me. In truth, it's unlikely he'll remember come tomorrow."

Cassie stepped over tackle and crates, squinting against the bright sunlight. She straightened. "I'm not sorry. You know I'm not."

"I know." With a sad smile, Mother turned to leave, murmuring instructions over her shoulder. "Time to hang the wash."

That was all? No reprimand? Cassie said not a word. Avoid-

ing Father was the part she had fretted over most, but fearing her actions had disappointed Mother . . .

Perhaps Mother wasn't sorry either. The thought gave her pause.

Cassie trudged through the grass-splotched yard as chickens squawked and flapped around her skirts. The worn garment tangled around her ankles.

At least she'd bought them time. Yes, she'd taken the only money to be had from the crock, but the tax man's demands were sated. If Mother had agreed with her actions, why did she not say so? Why could she never stand up to Father?

Before they had rounded the corner of the cabin, a wagon careened down the dirt road in front of the house, churning up splatters of mud and jostling with enough clatter to wake the dead. Cassie frowned. The driver was recognizable enough. Peter, her sister Eloise's husband, jumped from the bouncing wagon a hairsbreadth after he'd set the brake. His blond hair was windblown as if tossed by a dervish. His eyes were bright, sparkling with an excitement she'd rarely, if ever, witnessed from the sulky man.

Mother's face filled with sudden angst. "What's wrong? Is it Eloise?"

"Of course not." His Irish brogue lilted high as his chest puffed out with a billow. He hooked his thumbs around his suspenders. "You've not heard the news, then?"

Cassie stepped next to Mother's side. A cold stone sank in her stomach. "What news?"

His lips curved into a smile, revealing crooked yellow teeth. "Why, war, sister. War has been declared."

A Note from the Author



The inspiration for Cassie Kendrick came from a real woman named Emma Edmonds (also known as Emma Edmondson).

Just like Cassie, Emma enlisted to escape a doomed marriage arranged by her cruel father. She cut off her hair and assumed the name Frank Thompson. Her upbringing as a farm girl prepared her for the rigors of war, and she worked as a medical transport runner, regimental mail carrier, and eventually a spy for Allan Pinkerton. It is estimated that at least four hundred other women disguised themselves and enlisted during the Civil War.

I used some of Emma's life experiences to craft Cassie's story, yet Cassie remains completely fictitious. With the exception of a handful of historical figures like Allan Pinkerton, General George McClellan, and Mathew Brady, the characters in *Where Dandelions Bloom* have been completely spun from my imagination. And while most of the events in this book are drawn straight from history, on a few occasions I changed the timing or added a fictional battle in the interest of the story.

I encourage you to find out more about Emma and other courageous women who faced the impossible to give us the freedom we enjoy today.