

# *Circle of Spies*

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## CIRCLE OF SPIES

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*To my brave little princess, Xoë,  
and my little ~~prince~~ superspy, Rowyn.  
What would a day be without your giggles?*

## *Acknowledgments*

Whenever I try to come up with original plots, “different” often means “risky”—which means I email my editor in complete uncertainty. Thanks, Kim, for encouraging me to write this series as it needed written, and to the whole team at Harvest House, who I adore working with! Thanks too to my agent, Karen Ball, for being an awesome cheerleader and go-getter. You amaze me.

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*Books by Roseanna M. White*

**THE CULPER RING SERIES**

*BOOK 1—Ring of Secrets*

▶ <http://bit.ly/RingofSecrets>

*Fairchild's Lady*

(free e-romance novella)

*BOOK 2—Whispers from the Shadows*

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*A Hero's Promise*

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*BOOK 3—Circle of Spies*

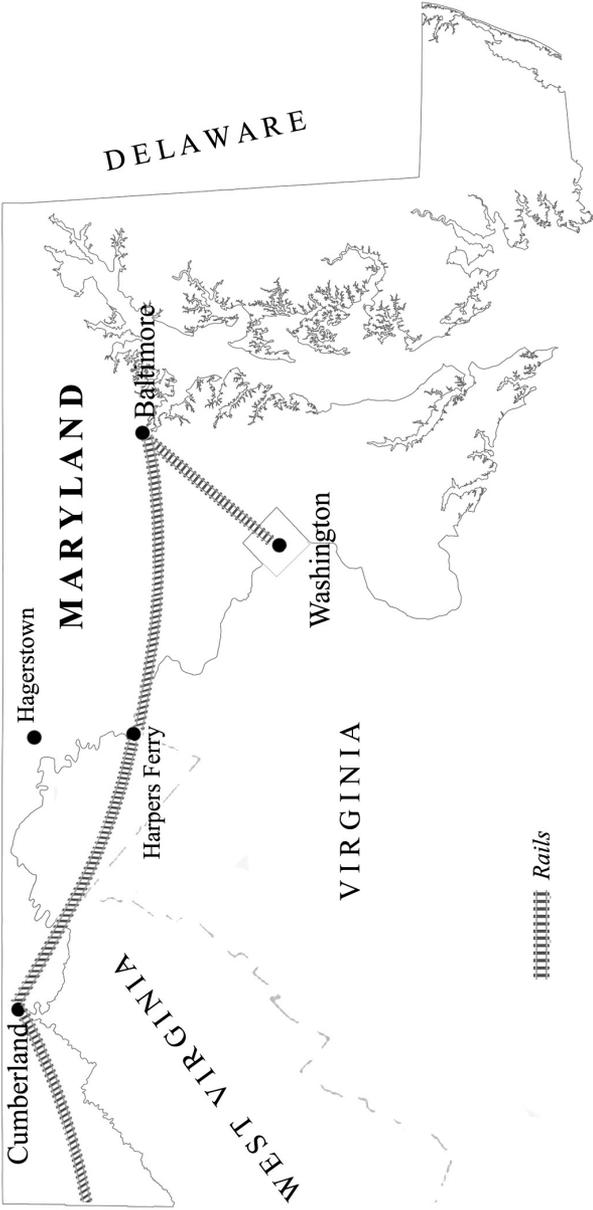
We have video clips showcasing our books.  
Check them out at the web addresses above.

*Now the brother shall betray the brother to death...  
And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake:  
but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.*

MARK 13:12-13



*Spies are about everywhere.*  
THE PRIVATE JOURNAL AND DIARY OF  
JOHN H. SURRETT, CONSPIRATOR

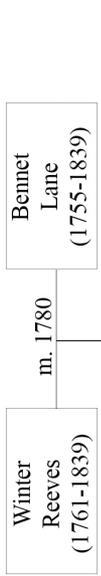


**MARYLAND RAIL LINES, 1865**

*Fairchild's Lady (Free Novella)*



*Ring of Secrets (Book 1)*



*Whispers from the Shadows (Book 2)*



*A Hero's Promise (Free Novella)*



*Circle of Spies (Book 3)*



**GENEALOGY OF  
THE CULPER RING SERIES**

# One

*Baltimore, Maryland*  
*January 16, 1865*

Marietta Hughes was the worst widow in the history of mourning. She smoothed a hand down the lavender fabric of her dress and felt the twist in her stomach that shouldn't have been so long absent. The punch to her heart that hadn't made itself known since the first month after Lucien died.

Squeezing her eyes closed, her fingers found the smooth mahogany of the grand staircase railing. Mother Hughes, still weak, her voice feathery, had looked so hopeful when she'd asked Marietta to don the muted colors of half mourning. How could she have refused her? True, it had only been a year and three months since Lucien's death. She had only been three months in second mourning—black relieved only by a white collar—rather than six. But there were so many others with fresh losses to grieve. Her widow's black had made a mockery of them.

Her widow's black had made a mockery of her.

She descended a few steps, but her eyes burned. Her husband was no doubt in heaven begging the Almighty to send a divine bolt to strike her. And not because of the color of her dress.

"I'm sorry, Lucien." The words came out a breath, but still they

seemed to taunt her. She should have said those words long before he fell prey to the violent streets of Baltimore. Said them for every thought gone astray, for every too-long look, for every wish she never should have made.

A low whistle made her jump and brought her gaze to her front door, to Lucien's brother. And her stomach twisted again at the object of those stray thoughts. The apple to her Eve.

*Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup.*

Marietta's feet pulled her down the stairs, toward where Devereaux Hughes stood with one hand upon the latch. His gaze swept over her, making her cheeks flush even as those words from the Holy Book pounded.

*Wicked. Wicked. Wicked.*

Sometimes she wished she had never read the Scriptures, so that they couldn't haunt her.

Sometimes she wished she could be, as her parents had advised time and again, *good*.

She swallowed back the regret and guilt—a skill she had mastered nearly six years earlier—and smiled. “Heading home, Dev?”

He leaned into the door, folding his arms so that the fabric of his well-tailored greatcoat strained against his muscles. Glory, but he was a fine-looking man with that charming smirk of his. “I have missed seeing you in color, Mari. Black never suited you.”

A fact that shouldn't have bothered her as it did. How vain was she, that she had dwelt on such a truth this past year instead of on the loss that necessitated it?

She smoothed out the wrinkle her fingers had made in the skirt and gave in to the tug that always pulled her closer to Dev, close enough for him to slide an arm around her waist. Given the quiet morning halls, the servants all tending to breakfast or Mother Hughes, she made no objection. Though her heart thudded its accusation.

*Wicked.*

Her throat tightened. She had never betrayed her husband, not in deed. And who would hold her thoughts against her? Other, of course, than God. And Lucien. She forced a swallow. “Your mother asked me

to move into half mourning. I was so glad to see her up and able to speak this morning that I hadn't the heart to argue."

Dev's jaw ticked. "I just saw her. She looks better, but if the doctor is not as hopeful as I expect when he stops in later—"

"I know." Her gaze landed on his cravat. "Dev..."

"Ah, how well I know that look." He bent his head, and when his lips touched her neck, her eyes slid shut. "Hope and regret mixed into perfect beauty. Do you recall when I first saw that expression upon your lovely face?"

As if she could ever forget. "The nineteenth of December, eighteen sixty."

His chuckle sent a pulse of shivers down her spine. "How quick you are with the date."

And usually she would have forced a hesitation. But she needn't with that particular recollection. "It was the day before my wedding."

"The day I met my brother's bride." His chuckle went bitter. "Had I obeyed my father and returned to Baltimore a year earlier, it would have been I you met at that ball. I who would have claimed you. I who—"

"Don't." She pulled away, though his arms granted her only another inch of space. She'd had similar thoughts—much to her shame. "Please, Dev."

Too late. His eyes, blue as July's sky, had already blended in her mind with Lucien's deep green. The parade through her memory had already begun. Each time she had let her thoughts go where they ought not. When she had held Dev's gaze a second too long. Had smiled too warmly.

She was despicable.

"I love you." Vulnerability sparked in his eyes, but his arms were still like iron around her waist. "I have loved you since I first set eyes on you."

The sob came out of nowhere, erupting in a gasp. She covered her mouth, squeezed shut her eyes, and jerked away. Dizziness washed over her when she tried to breathe. Cora had laced her corset too tight when she retied it—that was why the air wouldn't come. Her corset. Just her corset.

Not her conscience. Heaven knew that voice had been muted

most of her life, drowned out by the steady march of meaningless facts through her memory.

“Darling.” His fingers closed around her shoulders, so warm against the January chill. “Why does that make you cry? You have known so long how I felt.”

Too long. She had known and had held it to her heart, a secret blacker than the gown she had just ordered Cora to pack away. “Tell me I made him happy. Tell me he never knew.”

“Mari.” He turned her to face him again and tipped her chin up with a gentle touch. What was it about that narrow nose, that tapered chin, those two slashes of dark brows, that made her melt? He thumbed away a tear. “I have pushed you from mourning too fast. Yet I feel as though I have waited forever to claim you.”

Her gaze dropped, all the way to the yards of lavender fabric that declared her ready to ease back into society. Why did the declaration make her want to run and hide, when these fifteen months she had struggled so against the confines of black? “I should have better mourned him.”

She should have better loved him.

Dev’s hand rested on her cheek. “Finish your mourning and take what distance you need, darling. When these final three months are finished, you will be mine.”

She didn’t know whether to tip her mouth up to invite a forbidden kiss or to pull away. Whether to breathe in his bergamot scent with a smile or let a storm of tears overtake her.

A loud rap on the door saved her the decision and made them both jump. Pulling all those frustrating emotions back in, she waved away the servant who appeared from the kitchen corridor and opened the door herself.

Her smile went from halfhearted to full bloom when she craned her neck up, and up still more to take in her dawn visitor. “Granddad. What are you doing here so early?”

“Your father just made port, and I went to tell him about Fort Fisher’s fall yesterday—”

“Fort Fisher? In North Carolina?” Hope surged up, though Marietta settled a hand on her chest to contain it. It would be a mighty blow to the Confederacy, but that did not mean the war was over.

“Hadn’t you heard? Then I’m glad I thought to pay a call on my favorite girl while I was out.” Thaddeus Lane grinned, tapped a finger to her nose as he had since she was a tot, and strode inside. A blast of icy air came with him, against which she shut the door. When she turned again, his smile had faded to a glower aimed at Dev.

“Mr. Hughes. What are you doing here so early?”

Dev was never one to be flustered, though his smile looked strained. “Mother took a bad turn last night. We feared the worst. She pulled through, praise the Lord, but I couldn’t leave until I was sure of it.”

Both men sent her a glance. Dev’s, full of shared worry and relief and that black secret. Granddad Thad’s, full of censure. Marietta opened the door again. One of them at a time was plenty. “Shall I see you at dinner, Dev?”

“Dismissed.” He chuckled but obeyed the dictate and made for escape. “You shall. And do send a note to tell me what the doctor says, even if it is good news.”

“I will.” Her lips pulled of their own will into a soft smile for him. Though after she shut the door, all softness evaporated under the scathing regard drilling into her back. She turned around and looked at her grandfather with arched brows. “Must you treat him that way?”

Granddad’s scowl only deepened. “I am your grandfather, young lady. I will treat a man any way I please when I find him in your home at seven in the morning. Now get your cape. You are taking a walk with me.”

“I am not. It is freezing out there.” But even as she said the words, she reached for the heavy woolen cape on the rack. Granddad never issued orders. Not unless it was of the most vital importance. “You cannot condemn a man for being concerned for his mother.”

“If he were so concerned, he would move her into *his* house.”

Marietta fastened the toggle and wrenched open the door again. “Must we have this conversation for the ninety-second time?”

“Ninety-two, is it?” Amusement crept its way into his voice. “Is that an approximation or an exact count?”

She glared at him over her shoulder.

He pulled the door shut, and for a long moment held her gaze with glinting amber eyes. “How is it you can know the exact number of times I have said a certain thing, yet cannot see the wisdom in

obeying? Go home to your parents, Mari. Or take the money your husband left you and set up house somewhere else. Go to Alain in Connecticut—”

“No. This is *my* house, my home.”

He had to have known she would say it, just as she had the other ninety-one times. So why did he look so sorrowful as he offered her his elbow?

She tucked her hand into the crook with an exhalation blustery enough to rival the wind off the Chesapeake. “I am a woman of three and twenty. I am perfectly capable of maintaining my own living, and Mother Hughes needs me.”

He sighed, led her down the walk for a few steps, and then turned toward the drive.

Marietta dug in her heels. “You said a walk, Granddad. Why would we need to go to the carriage house?”

“We are walking *to* the carriage house. We need to talk, and that is the safest place.”

No, no it wasn’t. The carriage house was anything but safe. “We can just keep going down the street—”

“Marietta. *Come.*”

Her throat went dry. He hadn’t used her full name in so long...and that spark in his eyes was like a fuse. “What is it? Is something wrong? Grandmama? Mama, Daddy?”

“Something is wrong, but not with them. Please, Mari. For once in your life, stop fighting and do what I ask.”

He looked so serious, the lines in his face deepening. She nodded and complied, even though her corset seemed tighter with each step they took.

She had managed to avoid the carriage house and stables for more than a year and would have been happy to make it two. Not that any sour memories were connected to this particular building. It was the similar one at her parents’ that made her teeth grind together.

And the arrogant, infuriating man who had once mucked stalls there and now stood in *her* outbuilding, pitchfork in hand. She should have dismissed him years ago. Should have refused her brother’s pleading. Should have slapped that patronizing smile from Walker Payne’s face the first time he put it on.

“Morning, Walker.” Granddad said it with sobriety rather than cheer. Unusual for him.

Walker went still. He used his coat sleeve to wipe his forehead as he turned, a bit of a flush in his pale brown skin, an icy calm in his strange silver-blue eyes. “Mr. Lane.” His gaze landed on her. “Princess.”

Marietta withdrew her arm from Granddad’s so she could fold it with her other over her chest. “Are you still working here? I’d have thought you would have run off by now, looking for the next rush of adventure.”

Rather than rising to the bait or mentioning the wife and child that kept him chained to her household, he looked back to Granddad. “Are you sure about this, Mr. Lane?”

Were she a cat, her hackles would have risen. Whatever Granddad wanted to say to her, Walker obviously knew about it.

“It’s the only way.” Granddad drew in a long breath and caught her gaze. “Mari, I need to know where you stand. On the war.”

Of all the... “You question my loyalty? And in front of *him*?”

“Walker is family.”

“One’s great-grandmother being your housekeeper does not make one family!”

Walker, for some reason known only to the convoluted workings of his self-important mind, smiled. “How sorely I’ve missed you, Yetta.”

A breath of cynical laughter slipped out. He was no doubt as unhappy about his presence here as she was but just as bound by his word to Stephen.

“Could you children stop snapping at each other? We only have a few minutes.” Her grandfather led her deeper into the building, where the nauseating scent of hay and horses filled her nose. “Mari, I have no choice but to question you. Baltimore, all of Maryland, is a house divided. You married into a family with firm Southern roots—”

“Really, Granddad. Mother Hughes has been questioned enough on this subject. She may be from New Orleans, but her husband was as solid a Union man as you.” Her arms slid down to wrap around her middle. Just an attempt to keep her hands warm, that was all.

“I am asking about *you*, Mari.”

Why was she born to live through this blasted war? All she had wanted was to go to the theater, to entertain her friends, to dance until

her feet ached. A world that seemed so far removed now. “My brother gave his life for the Union. How can you question where I stand?”

“Your cousin gave his life for the Confederacy in the very same battle. How can I help but question?”

Again tears stung...though tears for Stephen seemed somehow different than those born of regrets for Lucien. “Stephen was my best friend.” Her only friend, when it came down to it.

Granddad slid closer. “Does that mean his cause is your cause? One you believe in enough to fight for? To risk dying for?”

Her arms went limp, and icy air nipped at her fingers. “You are scaring me.”

“I mean to. Walker?”

Her brother’s friend nodded and motioned them to follow him. “This way.”

A draft of vicious wind whistled through the building, making a chill skitter up her spine. “Where are we going?”

Granddad rested a hand against the small of her back. To lend comfort or to spur her onward if her feet faltered? “What do you know about the Knights of the Golden Circle?”

“The KGC?” The wind seemed colder. “That they’re a Copperhead group. A Southern-sympathizing social club that boasts hundreds of thousands of members.”

“Social club?” Granddad’s short laugh sounded dry. “Perhaps for many of those hundreds of thousands, but not for the high-level members. It is a very serious organization, one with a very dangerous agenda.”

“Promoting slavery. I know.”

Walker came to such an abrupt halt that she nearly ran into his back. His eyes shot shards of ice at her. “You want to say that a little more flippantly next time, princess?”

She dimpled and batted her lashes. “Perhaps I could try if you could be more sensitive to the subject.”

“Enough.” Her grandfather’s tone sounded mournful, bringing her gaze back to his face. “This is serious, Mari. A matter of murder and treason, of the deliberate destruction of the Union—and of which Lucien had a part, and Devereaux too.”

“Nonsense. They both pledged their loyalty to the Union.” Words that came so easily.

But Granddad shook his head, no hint of a jest in his eyes. “Only in words. Think of that unexplained delay in reopening the rail lines last year. Their ties to the land in Louisiana.”

Conversations between the Hugheses buzzed in her ears, images flashed. If she were to look at them in that light...but no, it couldn't be. She shook it off. “Half the city likely belongs to the KGC.”

The two men exchanged a glance that made her want to grit her teeth again. Granddad nodded, and Walker moved onward, his pace quick.

Marietta held her cape closed and wished she had taken the time to grab gloves or a muff. Her fingers were at the painful place between chilled and numb. “What does this have to do with me?”

“You will see soon enough. First, answer me this. What color dress were you wearing on the fifteenth of May in eighteen fifty?”

Of all the random... “Yellow, but I don't see what—”

“What is the first word on the third line on the second page of the fifth book upon the shelf in your room?”

He wanted to play games? Out here in the cold, in the smelly stables with that patronizing man? She lifted her chin. “I haven't read the fifth book.”

“The fourth then.”

She shook her head and stared at Walker's back when he stopped in the last stall and fooled with the hay. “It's ‘yesterday,’ but I—”

“What was the eighth word I spoke to you the last time we had dinner?”

“This,’ though I can hardly think what—”

“Well, it's time to think, Mari.” Granddad's gaze combined sorrow with determination. “Time to use that mind of yours for something other than drawing room repartee. Your memory is *perfect*.”

Walker knelt down and slid aside a board.

Marietta waved a hand at Granddad's words. “A parlor trick.”

“A gift of God.” He gripped her arm, a silent bid for her to look at him. Though when she saw the furor in his eyes, she wished she hadn't. “You have perfect recall, beyond even your grandmother's. Perhaps she can draw anything she sees, but you—your recollection extends to what you've heard, what you've done, when things happened. Do you not realize how rare that is? How special you are?”

Walker's scoffing laugh gave her the urge to place her half boot upon his back and give him a nice little kick into... "What is that hole?" Her voice felt strangled, frozen.

"Come see." Walker held out his hands, as if they were still children. As if she could trust him.

She took a step back. "If you think for even a moment that I will descend into some dank pit—"

"We have a very small window of time, Mari. Go." Granddad's hand on her back urged her onward.

But it was the glint of challenge in Walker's eyes that made her huff over to him. She tamped down the shudder when he lowered her into the black, yawning space. Followed him with chin held high when Granddad handed down a lantern and brought up the rear.

A tunnel. They were in a tunnel that stretched toward her house. "What is this?"

"I didn't want to bring you into this business, Mari." Her grandfather's voice echoed strangely off the timber walls. "When my parents passed the mantle of the Culpers to me, and then when I shared it with your father and uncles and Walker and Hez, there was always an understanding that we would shield the family who wanted no part of it. You. Ize. Most of your cousins. But we have no choice now."

Each word fell like a hammer upon a chisel, etching themselves into her mind. Yet with more force than normal words, with finality. "Culpers?"

Granddad prodded her onward. "The Culper Ring started in the Revolution. My mother was a spy in British-held New York, passing information through a collection of friends until it reached General Washington."

"Great-Grandmama Winter—a spy?" Impossible. Her portrait made her look like such a normal woman.

"When I took over during the next war with the British—"

"You?" The world tipped. Her laugh did nothing to right it. "Granddad, you are not a spy."

"Here we are." Walker set down the lantern and put his shoulder to a break in the timbers. "It will open only a foot, but it's enough to get a glimpse. It's a Knights' castle, no question."

A castle, one of their secret lairs? Here, between her home and

her carriage house? It could not be. And to prove it could not be, she grabbed the lantern, thrust it through the opening, and stuck her head in after it.

The walls were papered with charts and maps, lines drawn over them helter-skelter. Some of the North, with stars upon the major cities, some of the South, stretching all the way to Texas. One of the entire hemisphere, with a circle drawn around Havana as a center. Papers pinned with what looked like gibberish upon them. And there, nearly out of the dim circle of light, one of Lincoln's election posters. But with "King" scrawled above his name, and a cruel-looking X drawn through his face in an ink more red-brown than lampblack, something nearly the color of...

"Oh, God in heaven." Blood, it was blood. She stumbled back and would have dropped the light had Walker not rescued it. Would have fallen had her grandfather not caught her.

He held her fast. "That had better be a genuine beseeching of the Almighty, Mari, because we need to fall to our knees before Him. They are going to harm the president if we don't stop them. And we've done all we can from the outside."

"Not Dev. Please, not Dev."

Walker eased the opening shut and watched her closely in the golden light. "He's the captain of this castle, Yetta. He took over after Lucien died."

No. She squeezed shut her eyes, but that did nothing to blur the implications. If Granddad spoke rightly, then both of them had lied to her. Had told her she was the most important thing in the world but had undermined all her family stood for. Had made a fool of her. Had they been *using* her, her family's connections?

If it were true... "What is it you want from me?"

Granddad gave her a squeeze. "Allan Pinkerton is sending in a man. He has been in communication with Dev and ought to be arriving in town any day. You cannot let either of them know you realize what they are about, but you have to protect him where you can, Mari. Make sure he has the opportunities he needs to find information."

"His name's Slade Osborne. A New Yorker by birth, but more recently of Chicago. He's part of Pinkerton's Intelligence Service." Walker reached out and took her hand in his. Audacious, yes.

Inappropriate too. And oh, how it reminded her of happier days. “Can you do this, Yetta?”

She saw again that red-brown slash upon the yellowed poster. Shivered at the hatred that must have inspired the defacing. Had the same hand that so recently cupped her cheek marked the president’s image for destruction? Had the lips that had kissed her sworn treason?

She didn’t know. And the not-knowing made her knees want to buckle. For the first time in too many years, she turned her mind to prayer.

*Oh, God, if it’s true...What have I done?*