

## FALCON: A CIVIL WAR SPY FICTION EXCERPT

By Jane Singer

When war came in April of 1861, and our country split apart, Papa joined up with the 2<sup>nd</sup> New Hampshire Regiment to answer President Lincoln's call and fight for the Union. Nobody in town would chance watching me for fear I would eat their cats or make their children disappear.

He bore me off to Washington City and made me stay with his sister, my Aunt Salome. She was Southern born, a new widow with a fixed scowl and ten lopsided smudges of rouge on her cheeks. No true Rebel after all, I learned. She let her cook's son Isaac hide escaping slaves in the basement of her boarding house. He paid with his life when slave catchers shot him and dragged off his rescues.

But I wanted to find Papa, and fight in the war with him. I dressed up as a boy and followed him to his camp. I *was* a soldier-boy until Papa found me and sent me back to my aunt but not before the men slapped me on the back and bid me welcome to the war. "Little son, you got some grit there." *I was someone else. Hallelujah!*

That's when my life truly began again, when I met my trainer, Timothy Webster, Detective Allan Pinkerton's best spy posing as a cotton merchant from Alabama at my aunt's boardinghouse. I followed him one day and, well, he was no merchant. When I told him I knew he was disguised as someone he was not, and I will tell you more about that, just know he saw something in me he could use ... finally. My first test was when he dumped off in a section of town I didn't know. I had to find my way back using all my powers of recollection. "Don't pause. Don't rest," Mr. Webster said. When I rounded the last corner, stepping over fourteen broken bricks, Mr. Webster demanded I tell him in exact detail what I'd seen. "Streetlamps, twenty. A carriage house on the corner. Two lamps in the windows. Five candles burning in five windows. Fourteen stray cats. Six kittens. Two alleyways with dead ends and two dead mules. Three drunken men singing Camptown Races off key. "Good, Miss Bradford, good eyes and sharp ears," he said patting my hand.

“We will work again tomorrow.” My heart sang.  
The next day, on my own, I wandered the streets of the city and

I saw him in front of the Rebel spy Rose Greenhow’s house disguised as a ranting street preacher, a bent finger over the bible. He was staring at the house while he preached the good book.

I crept close to him and whispered, “Just as I rounded the corner, I saw two dolls with red petticoats in the window of the house. They are surely a signal. And a young girl comes and goes from there with Mrs. Greenhow slipping a dispatch into her hand.” He looked hard at me. “She will be captured by Mr. Pinkerton, soon,” he said. “Yes, she signals her couriers by changing the colors of the doll’s petticoats. Yes. And we have eyes on her courier. Yes, you saw just right.” He motioned me away.

“Now go. I will see you back at the boardinghouse and teach you the cipher codes.” Pinkerton. I’d heard the name.

That was just the beginning. In a secret location, like a huge barn, two men and a woman trained me. Grabbed from the back. Thrown on the ground. Ducking punches, kicks, and more. Much more as I learned to fight off assailants and shoot like a marksman. Then, more tests. Honing my fighting and shooting skills until Mr. Webster was satisfied. So, it was my memory that unloosed itself to the tiniest detail and the fact that I didn’t give a tinker’s damn about what might happen to me that won over Mr. Webster.

And I finally met Detective Allan Pinkerton in the basement of a chop house. Strapping ham-fisted men at the door, and out of a swirl of cigar smoke, came a small, burly, bearded man, a lit cigar clamped in his teeth, flecks of ash dotting his beard.

In a rough growl that was a Scottish burr, he said, “Mr. Webster trusts ye, lass. Will I?” I refused to squirm under his gaze.

“You shall, sir. You will come to trust me.”

“You cub of a wee bairn, you dare to presume?”

“I will do you proud, sir. Or die in the try.”

“We will see, lass, we will see.” His voice was low, rumbling. “But you must always be on guard, your gun at the ready. And never, never show any sign of weakness.”

And did he know about my spells? Were they over?

“If you feel yourself tumbling away, your mind that is—*he knew*—take cover and disappear so nary a soul can find you. Or you risk capture and might die at the hands of the enemy. Should that happen, we cannot save you.”

“I will save myself, sir.”

A stab of fear up my spine.

My eyes welled up.

“And we never cry, lass, no matter what befalls us.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well then, you must pass muster with our band of warriors. We are all special soldiers in President Lincoln’s army, the lot of us.”