



The
PRINCE
of SPIES

HOPE AND GLORY

Book Three

RITA Award-Winning Author

ELIZABETH
CAMDEN

H O P E ^{AND} G L O R Y
B O O K T H R E E

The
P R I N C E
of SPIES
E L I Z A B E T H
C A M D E N



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One



JANUARY 1902

Marianne ventured farther onto the frozen river despite the people warning her against it. “Don’t do it, ma’am!” someone shouted. “You’re going to fall through the ice!”

Several other bystanders urged her back to safety, but she couldn’t ignore the pitiful howls of Bandit, who had fallen through the ice. The dog wasn’t going to be able to get out on his own. Marianne had already spent an agonizing five minutes encouraging the border collie to clamber out. Bandit tried, but each time it looked as if he’d succeed, another section of ice broke, and he plunged back into the freezing water.

Marianne crawled on all fours across the ice, the cold quickly penetrating her thin leather gloves.

“If the ice can’t hold a dog, it can’t hold you!” someone on the shore shouted.

Maybe, but she knew the Boundary Channel better than most of the city dwellers who walked alongside this oddly shaped tail of the Potomac River in the heart of Washington, DC. She had photographed it last spring, wearing hip-high galoshes and wading into the shallows to take pictures for the Department of the Interior. Most of the lagoon was shallow

and only got deep out in the middle where Bandit had fallen through. The ice beneath her was probably frozen solid.

Probably. If she thought about it any longer, she'd be too scared to continue, so she lowered herself to lie flat on the ice, using her feet to nudge closer to Bandit.

"Get him, Aunt Marianne, please!" Sam was the only person among the dozens on shore who urged her forward. What nine-year-old boy didn't love his dog? She had to at least try to save Bandit. The only tool she had was a fishermen's net that had been abandoned on the riverbank. She'd throw it toward Bandit and hope she could pull him out.

Her teeth chattered. Was it from cold or fear? Probably both. A layer of crusty snow atop the ice gave her enough traction to creep farther ahead.

Then a man's voice, louder than the others, sounded over the crowd. "Luke, don't be a fool!"

"Please, mister," Sam begged. "Please help Aunt Marianne save my dog!"

She risked a glance over her shoulder, grateful to see another man crawling out onto the ice. She hadn't wanted to do this alone, but no one else volunteered.

"I don't think the ice can hold both of us," she called back to him, her voice shaking from the cold.

"It can where you are," he said, then lowered himself to his stomach. He gave a healthy push against a post sticking through the ice and propelled quickly across the frozen channel toward her.

What a handsome man. Black hair, dark eyes, and a face animated with both fear and exhilaration. He was soon alongside her, his breath coming in white wisps.

"Hello, Aunt Marianne," he said. They both lay flat on the ice, side by side. An odd way to meet a perfect stranger.

"Careful," she cautioned. "The water gets deeper only a couple of feet ahead. I don't think it will hold us both."

“I *know* it won’t,” he said. “Hand me the net.”

“Are you sure? I’m lighter. It might be better if I go.”

His gaze flicked down her length. They both wore long wool coats, gloves, and boots, but he was a lot taller than she was.

“One of us is probably going to end up in the water,” he said. “Your skirts will be a big problem if it’s you. I’ll be okay.”

“I don’t think it’s safe.” Her teeth started to chatter again.

“Of course it’s not safe.” He grinned. “Hand me the net.”

“Luke, get back to shore this instant!” an angry voice commanded, but Luke didn’t even glance back.

“Don’t worry about that guy,” Luke said. “It’s only my brother, Gray. Being a worrywart is what older brothers are supposed to do.”

She laughed a little. “I know all about big brothers. I’ve got one too. Here’s the net. If you can make it a few more feet, you can toss it to the dog.”

He nodded, but instead of taking the net, he grabbed her hand and squeezed. “This is sort of fun, don’t you think?”

“Actually, I’m a little terrified,” she admitted.

“Me too.”

How odd. He was afraid but still seemed elated. Her eyes felt captured by his, and even through their gloves, it felt like a spark of electricity hummed between them.

“Luke!” Gray shouted again from the shore. “The ice can’t hold you. Both of you need to come back. Someone has sent for a boat.”

Bandit wasn’t whining anymore. He was barely even moving, just wiggling enough to keep his snout above water. Marianne met Luke’s eyes. Going back would be the prudent thing to do, but she’d come too far to turn back now.

“Bandit can’t last until the boat gets here,” she said.

“I know. Give me the net, and I’ll go get him. Wish me luck, Aunt Marianne.”

With that, he began sliding forward. The stern man on shore

continued to holler warnings, but others cheered him on. Luke was moving over the deeper part of the lagoon now, where the ice wasn't solid. It let out a *crack*, and Luke stopped, still a few yards from the dog. The net would extend his reach a few feet, but not much. After a moment Luke began inching forward again. Bandit sensed help was near and started struggling, reaching a paw onto the ice and trying to climb out.

More cracks sounded, like whips slicing through the air. The ledge of ice tilted, and water sloshed up, soaking Luke with a wave of icy water in his face, but he calmly tossed the net toward Bandit, whose scrabbling paws got caught in its mesh. Luke began tugging, but the ice broke, and he plunged into the water.

A cry tore from Marianne's throat. Luke was completely submerged, but within seconds, his head rose above the surface, and with a mighty push, he shoved Bandit up onto the ice. Cheers rose from the crowd as Bandit staggered toward land.

Luke was still in the water and needed help. He flung the net toward her, still hanging on to one end. She reached for it but screamed in frustration when it proved a few inches beyond her reach. She held her breath and moved forward, terrified the ice would break, but Luke's stricken face was white with pain. She moved another inch, stretched her hand farther, and managed to wrap her fingers around a loop in the net.

"I've got it!" she yelled. She tugged but couldn't pull Luke out.

"Hang on, ma'am. We're coming."

The grim voice came from behind her. Luke's brother was traversing the solid portion of ice, lying flat as he reached out toward her. He grabbed her ankle and pulled on it, but she slid only a few inches before the slack in the net went taut with Luke's weight, and she stopped.

Another set of hands grabbed her other ankle and pulled. The bystanders on the shore formed a human chain as the men pulled with all they had. The net between her and Luke

squeaked from the tension, but it gave Luke enough momentum to climb out onto the ice. Now that he was out of the water, the men were able to pull a lot harder, and Marianne zoomed backwards toward the shoreline, Luke following. She scrambled safely up onto solid land.

Luke arrived right behind her. His teeth chattered, and trembling racked his entire body. A pair of men hauled him upright to yank his sopping coat off, then his shirt. His skin was blanched white as his brother bundled him into a dry coat, then used a scarf to dry his hair.

Luke was laughing. He still quaked with cold, but she'd never seen such a good-natured smile as people reached out to shake his hand and slap him on the back. He looked around for Bandit, who was getting a rubdown from Sam. Luke went to meet the dog.

It was the perfect photograph.

She raced to the juniper tree where she'd abandoned her government-issued Brownie camera. It didn't take long to fling the lanyard around her neck and return to the bank. By now Luke had picked up Bandit, holding the shivering dog against his bare chest, still laughing.

"Can I take your photograph?" she asked.

His smile deepened in a combination of pride and happiness. It was all the permission she needed. She steadied the boxy camera against her diaphragm as she looked down through the viewfinder, slid the aperture open, and pressed the lever to take the photograph. The sun reflecting on snow made plenty of ambient light, so it only took a few seconds to capture the image.

"Thanks," she said.

Luke bent over to set Bandit on the ground. "Thank you, Aunt Marianne."

He looked like he wanted to say more, but his brother, a tall dark-haired man who looked similar to Luke except a lot more serious, was dragging him toward a carriage.

“Let’s get you home and in front of a warm fire,” Gray said. “We’ll be lucky if you don’t catch your death of cold.”

“Always a ray of sunshine,” Luke chided, but he didn’t resist as his brother nudged him toward the carriage. Luke climbed inside, but before he closed the carriage door, he met her gaze across the frozen landscape and flashed her a wink.

The carriage rolled away, and just like that, the most amazing man she’d ever met was gone.



Luke Delacroix wrapped his hands around the mug of hot cocoa, leaning so close to the fireplace that the heat from the flames baked the side of his face. He savored the sensation, for he was still chilled to the bone. A weird sense of elation lingered as he thought of that moment on the ice, lying flat with his hand clinging to a woman who had more courage than all the bystanders on the shore put together. She was a complete stranger who didn’t feel like a stranger at all. She had dark hair and pretty blue eyes filled with trepidation, but she was out there. He’d been in her presence for only a few minutes but already admired her. Sometimes people revealed their true character very quickly.

He didn’t know who she was, but he’d have it figured out before the end of the day. It would be easy. Number one: he was a spy and good at ferreting out information. Number two: the Brownie camera she used had a government stamp on the case, meaning she probably worked for the Department of the Interior. How many female photographers named Marianne worked for the Department of the Interior?

Gray stomped into the parlor and set a bowl of steaming chowder on the table along with a wedge of cheese.

“Eat all of it,” he ordered, still annoyed over what had happened at the Boundary Channel. They had been on their way to move in to Luke’s new office when snarled traffic slowed

their carriage and Luke noticed the bystanders watching a lone woman venture onto the ice to save a floundering dog. He'd ordered the carriage to stop so he could help.

Luke exchanged the mug of cocoa for the soup and began eating even though he wasn't hungry. The chowder was hot, filling, and the doctor said he still needed to gain another ten pounds to replace the thirty he'd lost in Cuba.

"Should I send a wire to the landlord, telling him we can't take possession of the office today?" Gray asked. "I don't want you leaving the house if your hair is still wet. You could get pneumonia."

Luke was thirty years old, but Gray still smothered him like a mother hen since he got back from Cuba, sick and emaciated. Luke didn't mind. He'd put his family through a lot over the past year, and he owed them. So he tolerated Gray's fussing, ate even when he was no longer hungry, and tried to behave himself.

Tried but didn't always succeed. What sort of man would he be if he ignored that woman attempting to rescue a dog all on her own?

He leaned his head toward the fire, rubbing his hair to make it dry faster. "We can still move in today. I need to get the Washington bureau of the magazine up and running. The November elections might seem a long way off, but I've got an interview with Dickie Shuster at the end of the week. I need to be moved in before that."

"We have to be careful," Gray said, and this time Luke knew the warning had nothing to do with wet hair or proper nutrition. It had everything to do with the fact that Dickie Shuster was slick, underhanded, and probably the cleverest reporter in all of Washington. "Dickie is still an ally of the Magruders. He will be quietly working to undermine you in hopes of promoting Clyde and the Magruder cause."

"Wrong," Luke replied. "Dickie will do whatever is necessary to promote *himself*."

The Delacroixs and the Magruders had been bitter rivals for generations. They'd never liked each other, but their animosity boiled over shortly after the Civil War. The Delacroix family, long one of the wealthiest merchant families in Virginia, had lost everything in the war. Their home was burned to the ground, and all four of their merchant vessels were seized by the federal government and never returned. Following the war, their ships were put up for auction. Luke's father attended the auction to bid on *The Sparrow*, the smallest of the ships, in a desperate attempt to start rebuilding their fortune.

Gloating at the auction was Jedidiah Magruder, the patriarch of the Magruder clan, who drove the price higher and higher. Luke's father couldn't compete, and the Magruders bought *The Sparrow* for a fraction of its worth. The Magruders didn't even export their goods, so they had no need for a merchant ship. They simply bought it to rub his father's nose in the fact that they could. If there was any doubt about the Magruders' motives, that was put to rest when Jedidiah stripped the ship of its valuables, then burned it in the harbor. "We had a great Confederate bonfire!" he had bragged to the press.

That incident elevated the bitter family feud into one of seething hatred, and it grew worse over the years. The Magruders weren't above bribing journalists to throw mud at the Delacroixs, and they'd used Dickie Shuster in the past.

"Dickie can be flipped, and I intend to flip him," Luke said.

It wouldn't be easy, but Luke had plenty of connections in this city. He was also smarter than the Magruders. He didn't mind cozying up to Dickie Shuster in order to get an upper hand in the local press. Now that his health was on the mend, it was time to resume his life as a journalist, and that meant moving into his new office.

Freezing air shocked his system the moment he stepped outside again. He ignored it and climbed into the carriage, Gray following. If all went well, they could still get him settled into

his new office by the end of the day. He tried to beat back his shivers as the carriage set off toward downtown Washington.

“Have the Magruders made any progress stealing revenue from our spice business?” Luke asked, desperate to get his mind off the chill seeping into his core again.

The corners of Gray’s mouth turned down. “They’re trying. Their bottled spices went nowhere, but they’re stealing a ton of my business in vanilla extract.”

The Delacroix family had built their fortune on expensive spices and seasonings, while the Magruders became even richer by selling canned foods. The families had always been rivals, but now the gloves were off and the stakes were higher. Clyde Magruder, the leader of the family, had been elected to Congress and would surely try to wield that power to grind the Delacroixs into the dirt.

“The Magruders are using chemicals to imitate vanilla,” Gray continued. “It’s a concoction cooked up in a laboratory, made of wood-tar creosote and chemical flavorings. It costs pennies to produce by the vat, so I’ll never be able to compete on price. Yes, they’re hurting our business.”

And Delacroix Global Spice was a very lucrative business. They imported the finest spices from around the world and were the most prestigious brand on the market. The Delacroix name was synonymous with quality and prestige, but the Magruders were the opposite. They made their fortune mass producing consumer staples like canned beans and potted ham. They adulterated their products with fillers and preservatives, but they kept their prices low. Now they were encroaching into the spice business, and it was a threat.

Luke pulled the edges of his coat tighter as he stared out at the gloomy January cityscape. He wore his warmest winter coat, thick gloves, and a wool scarf, but the chill was still getting to him. Even the air in his lungs felt cold, and he began shivering again.

“Luke, this isn’t a good idea,” Gray said.

If they could just get to the new office building, he wouldn’t be so cold. It had a coal-fired heater, and he’d be able to warm up eventually.

“I’ll be okay,” he said, wishing his teeth did not chatter as he spoke. “And I really hate the Magruders. Or *Congressman* Magruder, I now must say. Can you believe it? I heard he’s renting the fanciest town house on Franklin Square. Now that I’m back in Washington, I’ll make sure his chances for reelection evaporate.”

Gray leaned forward and opened the panel behind the driver’s bench. “Please turn the carriage around,” he instructed the driver. “We’re heading home.” He settled back into his bench, concern darkening his face. “Don’t let impatience lead you into doing something foolish. You’ll be out of the action for weeks if you come down with a case of pneumonia.”

Luke sighed. Gray was probably right, but this was about so much more than the enmity between two families or the price of spices. This was about the niggling, insatiable need to take Clyde Magruder down a peg. The man didn’t belong in Congress, and Luke could get him out.

His gaze strayed out the carriage window to where the Capitol Building loomed in the distance, its iconic white dome a symbol of the power wielded by the men of this city. Somehow he was going to figure out a way to influence what went on beneath that dome. It would probably take decades, but he’d get there in the end. Gray was right. He couldn’t afford to get sick just because he was impatient.

The carriage turned around, and he noticed a flower cart brimming with roses and carnations. The rest of the city was dreary, overcast, and covered in snow, but the splash of red caught his eye.

“I wonder how they get roses to bloom in January.”

Gray followed his gaze to the flower cart. “The Department

of Agriculture has acres of greenhouses. They can force anything to bloom.”

“Stop the carriage,” Luke said impulsively. In a world blanketed by ice and snow, it was suddenly vitally important to admire those flowers. Once the carriage stopped, he bounded outside and reached for the largest bundle of roses on the man’s cart. “Can you have these delivered?” he asked.

A young boy helping at the cart eagerly accepted the task in exchange for a few coins.

“Do you want to send a message with it?” the vendor asked.

He did. The vendor handed him a card. Luke’s hand shook from the cold, but he quickly jotted a message.

Thank you for a memorable morning, Luke.

“Send them to the Department of the Interior, addressed to Miss Marianne,” he said.

He beamed with elation as he returned to the carriage.