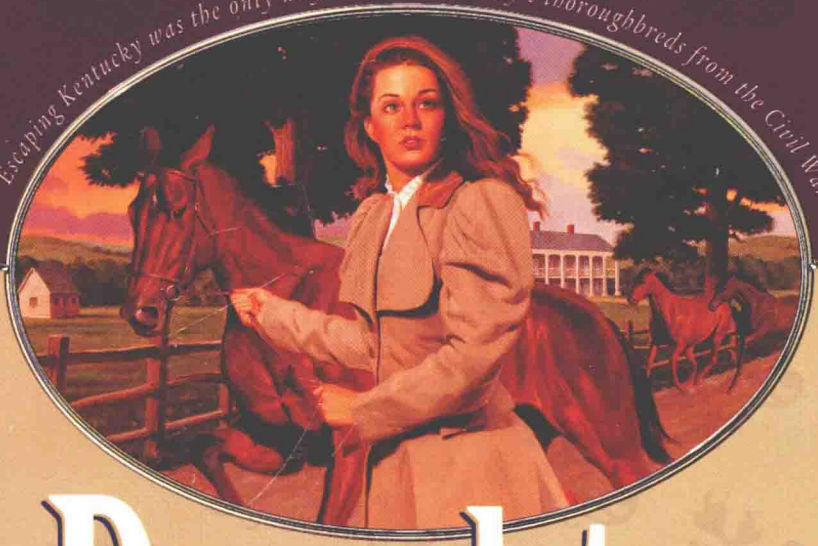
A Secret Refuge

LAURAINE SNELLING

Escaping Kentucky was the only way to save her family's thoroughbreds from the Civil War.



Daughter of Twin Oaks

LAURAINE SNELLING

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BETHANY HOUSE PUBLISHERS
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA 55438

Daughter of Twin Oaks
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Lauraine Snelling

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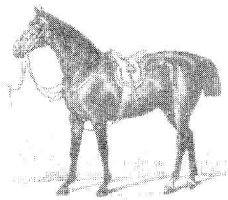

DEDICATION

To the Brown Family and
all the others at Family Circle.
Y'all made our visit the highlight of the trip,
and your help on things southern will carry on.
Thank you for the hugs and joy-filled love.
Donny, Jenny, Sarah, Jonathan, Rebekah, and Suzanne,
you make our lives richer, and we thank you for that.

LAURAINE SNELLING is an award-winning author of over twenty-five books, including fiction and nonfiction for adults and young adults. Besides writing both books and articles, she teaches at writers' conferences across the country. She and her husband, Wayne, have two grown sons, four granddogs, and make their home in California.

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Daughter of Twin Oaks

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Daughter of Twin Oaks

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Kentucky Dreamer
Call for Courage
Shadow Over San Mateo
Out of the Mist
Second Wind
Close Call
The Winner's Circle

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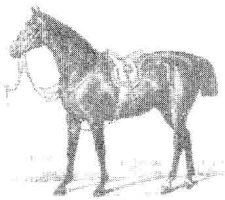

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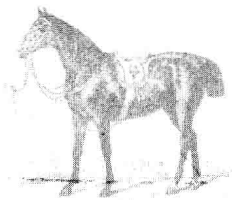


My thanks goes to the Historical Societies of Wyoming, Kansas, Missouri, and Kentucky. People there know how to research and taught me much. So many compilations of diaries, letters, and other books helped me research both the era and the area. My special thanks to Tom at Joseph Beth bookstore in Lexington and to Bryan S. Bush, who wrote *The Civil War Battles of the Western Front* and let me run my plot line by him at the Old Bardstown Civil War Museum and Village, where he is assistant curator. The folks at Fort Laramie, Fort Kearney on the Platte River, the Oregon Trail Museum in Independence, and the Wilson Creek Battlefield in Missouri all provided more blocks to add to my building novel.

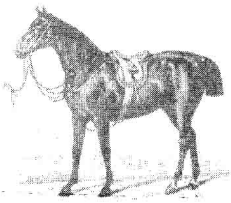
I am blessed to have some of the best editors and readers who keep my time lines clear and my facts straight. Sharon Asmus and Helen Motter are two of God's gifts to my writing, along with all the others at Bethany House who work so hard to publish these books.

Husband Wayne says he never knew he wanted to know so much about the Civil War, but with each book I've written, he has contributed more and more in the research and development of the stories. Thank God for someone who remembers where places are on the map and where he read whatever it is I need at the moment and loves to travel the backroads to find all the sites mentioned in our research.

Thanks to all my readers who let me know how much they enjoy my books. Without readers I couldn't do what I love—write stories. I'd hate to have to go flip hamburgers at McDonald's. What a mighty God we serve.

Hugs and blessings,
Lauraine.

PROLOGUE



Midway, Kentucky
Spring 1860

"Jesselynn, what you doin' wit dem britches on?"

Jesselynn Highwood scrunched her eyes closed as if by not seeing Lucinda's scowl, Lucinda couldn't see her.

"You heard me, chile." Lucinda moved silently in spite of her bulk, a habit acquired during years of slave training. "What yo' mama gonna say?"

"What Mama doesn't know won't hurt her." Jesselynn spun away from the restraining hand on her arm. "You don't have to tell her every little thing, you know." *And besides, I'm not a "chile" any longer.* Sometimes Jesselynn thought she should have accepted one of those suitors who'd come callin' on her daddy, just to get out from under both Mama's and Lucinda's thumbs. Jesselynn squared her shoulders. "If you must know, I'm goin' down to the stables to ride Ahab for his morning works."

"Young ladies don' ride stallions, young ladies don' wear britches, and..." Lucinda drew herself up to her full imposing height by sucking in a lungful of air. "Young ladies don' disobey dey mama." She let a silence lengthen for effect. " 'Sides, what happen to that lazy pup Abe? Dem horses him responsibility for running 'round de track."

"His arm still isn't strong enough from when he broke it. You know that."

Lucinda's harrumph said she might know it but in no way agreed.

Jesselynn continued, ignoring her mammy's mutterings and knowing she could be accused of impudence. Lucinda could be as

stubborn as one of those old field mules at times.

"Zachary's at school, Adam is too heavy, and we all know I can get more out of those horses than anyone else." Jesselynn sneaked a peek from under the tan porkpie hat she wore pulled down over her brow. Lucinda hadn't budged. The frown on her shiny black brow looked deep enough to plant tobacco in.

"Dey's other boys down in de quarters a'wantin' to ride. Now you just get yo'self back up dem stairs and change yo' clothes before yo' mama come down dem stairs. State she in, you want her to feel worse?" She pointed back up the carved walnut staircase with one hand and reached to turn Jesselynn by the shoulder with the other. Miriam Highwood, coming close to term, spent much of her days lying down either in bed or on the lounge in the parlor. Feeling so ill with this baby forced her to depend more on others, her eldest daughter especially.

Jesselynn glared at the old woman with all her sixteen years of practice but turned and made her way to the first landing, her back straight. She refused to allow herself to stomp on each tread as she wanted to. She had outgrown that at least. *You should have known better than to come down the front stairs*, she scolded herself. Out the window by way of the live oak tree would have been better. Joseph needed her down at the stables. She'd have to talk to her father about this again. He had said she could ride. But she had to be honest. He hadn't said she could ride Ahab—in britches.

Even he had bowed to her mother's edict that Jesselynn was no longer a child, that she was close to marrying age, and it was long past time for her to learn to act like a lady.

"Piffle." Jesselynn knew that if she didn't get down to the barns quickly, the entire day's routine would be in an uproar. What was all the ballyhoo about women wearing pants after all? It certainly made more sense than those bulky skirts and hoops and petticoats—and confining corsets. After all, she had nothing that needed squeezing in or pushing up. Because she was tall and wore britches and a hat that hid her sun-kissed hair, she'd been taken for a boy more than once. She peeked down over the banister. Lucinda hadn't moved from her guard at the newel-post, and the glare she sent upward made Jesselynn continue on to her room. She plopped down on the edge of the bed. Outside she could hear the robin's morning song, echoed by the cardinal's. Everyone, or rather, everything was outside but her.

She crossed to the window and pushed aside the lacy curtains. No one was in sight. Lucinda had stayed at her post, or at least was still in the house. Jesselynn pushed the window higher and bent to crawl out, reaching with one leg for the thick branch she'd used as an escape hatch for years. She found her footing from long practice, hand over hand guided herself down the tree, and dropped from the last branch to the thick lawn.

Young ladies shouldn't have to go out their windows and down the tree, either. She threw the thought over her shoulder as she trotted down the dirt road to the stables. *One of these days I'll have a plantation of my own to manage, and then we'll see who rides what.* After all, that's what all well-bred southern gentlewomen did, marry and manage their husband's house as well as a good part of the plantation. She knew there had been two young men asking her father's permission to court her. But when her father asked her about them, she'd shrugged and shaken her head. They were just boys, after all. He hadn't insisted.

"Piffle. I'd rather ride than be married any day." Ignoring the thrust of guilt that reminded her she should be at her mother's side for the day's instructions, she trotted past the slave quarters, a row of small houses with gardens in back. She knew her father provided better houses for the slaves than most of the plantation owners. And while some of the younger slaves had been in the classroom with her, she wasn't supposed to know that he taught all his people to read, write, and do sums too. It was against the law for slaves to read, but Major Joshua Highwood was a farseeing, godly man who believed the law was wrong and he had to follow his own conscience. Jesselynn argued that slavery was also wrong, but so far he hadn't written the manumission papers for his slaves.

She missed him when he was gone, as he had been the last week, off to Frankfort, trying to keep the South out of war. Or at least Kentucky. Both of her brothers, Adam, the elder at twenty-two, and Zachary, at nineteen, were all-fired sure the South would win the war in a week—three at the most.

She'd heard so many rantings of the wonders of southern chivalry, she was sick of it. Why should the women just smile and say how wonderful the men were? How glorious to go off and fight—for what, she wasn't sure after eavesdropping on their near-to-fisticuffs discussions. She had a feeling many of the hotheaded young men weren't too sure either. The glory of fighting was all they could

talk about, how they would run right over the enemy. Maybe they didn't think about getting shot, injured, or killed. Men's wounds wouldn't be much different than a deer's, for pity's sake. She'd cried buckets the first time she saw a deer that had been shot. The bullet hole that tore open its heart still showed up sometimes in her dreams.

It was all a conundrum to her. She smiled to herself—that was her newest word. She liked to be able to use a new word three times in the next day. Then she would remember it forever—or so the boys' tutor had said. After Adam and Zachary went off to school, he'd stayed on to teach the three younger girls, another of her father's wars against the mores of the day.

"Hello, handsome," she greeted the fiery red, or blood bay, stallion, Ahab, who bobbed his head and nickered as soon as he saw and heard her.

"How you this mornin', Missy Jess?" The soft voice of Joseph, their head groom, floated out from the stall where he was giving the stallion one last brushing. "This ol' son surely be ready to run."

"Good. I am too." Jesselynn inhaled the fragrance of clean horse, which was better in her mind than any perfume, even those made in Paris. She rubbed the stallion's ears and smoothed his black forelock. "You been behavin'? You know I got in a mighty lot of trouble this mornin' to come ride you, so don't you go givin' me any sass, that clear?" The Thoroughbred nodded as if he understood every word.

Joseph gave her a leg up. "If'n I din' know better, I'd think you was a boy, up der like dat." Joseph shook his head. "What this world a'comin' to?" He led the prancing stallion out to the half-mile track, all bounded with white board fences and dug every week to keep the sand loose so as not to injure the legs of the Thoroughbreds that trained on it. Twin Oaks Farm had turned out some of the top winners at Keeneland Track in Lexington, and buyers came from all around the South when the Twin Oaks' yearlings went on sale every November.

Jesselynn let the old man ramble. He'd been the one to pick her up after she fell off her first pony. Her brothers had been laughing too hard to help. She lifted her face to the sun, barely peeking over the horizon, too new to burn off the morning coolness. Why would anyone want to waste this perfect part of the day in bed? Of course that was why she was able to sneak out the way she did. Her mother

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