

The Rebel's Bride



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To Terry Ann
My best friend and my sister
And to T' Bear
My adorable grandson



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Chapter One



Catherine Thorpe sat huddled on the stairs covering her ears. She could still hear her uncle roaring at her cousin. She knew the argument well. It had continued all afternoon.

“You will marry who I say you will marry, young lady! You’re lucky any member of the peerage would even consider you after your disgrace. If the viscount did not live in America, and his father did not owe me a considerable sum of money, even he would pass you up.” Her uncle’s voice raised in anger.

“But I do not want to live in that savage country!” Sabrina replied. “We are at war with them. They are Britain’s enemies!”

“The war will not last forever.”

Catherine chewed her lip as she eavesdropped. Her uncle was determined to see Sabrina settled.

“And I suppose it will not bother you one wit that I will be wed to a murderer.” Sabrina spoke so quickly Catherine wondered if she had practiced

the argument.

“He killed Lord Marshant in a fair duel.”

“Over the man’s wife! It was a terrible scandal, Father.”

“Don’t you dare speak to me of scandal.”

Catherine knew they could go on for hours; both yelling, neither listening. If only Sabrina had not been quite so foolish as to try to meet with one of her many gentlemen friends while her father entertained. Catherine sighed. Whatever possessed her to use the garden house for her rendezvous?

“Poor Sabrina,” Catherine murmured. She recalled how no one listened when Sabrina tried to explain.

The door to the library slammed shut. Catherine looked up to see her cousin storm from the room. Even in her rage she was beautiful. It was no wonder she was constantly set upon by young men. Her soft blond hair was the perfect foil for her large blue eyes. Every woman wanted to look like her—and every man desired her. Catherine thought she looked like an angel. She extended her arms to comfort her cousin.

“Oh, Catherine,” Sabrina sobbed. “Father will not change his mind.”

“I know, Sabi,” Catherine consoled her with a pat on her back. “I heard it all. He... is being so unreasonable.” She took Sabrina’s hand and led her up the stairs to her room. “If it were not for

that dreadful Lady Wentworth, none of this would have happened.”

“She is so cruel!” Sabrina cried. “I am sure she told everyone it was my fault to save her precious nephew.” She looked up and sobbed. “What am I going to do? I... I just cannot bear the thought of going away to that savage land.”

Rising, she began to pace. Every few steps she glanced at Catherine. “I do not know a thing about surviving outside of London. I am not like you. You had to help run your small estate and are so talented. You can cook and sew and... Oh, Catherine!” She dropped to her knees to place her tear-streaked face in Catherine’s lap. “I shall simply die there, I know it!”

Tenderly, Catherine stroked the blond curls before her. She adored her cousin, but Sabrina was right. Her talents were few. Being mistress of a house fell beyond her. Shopping and playing the perfect hostess were the extent of her abilities.

Catherine sighed. “Surely you cannot envy me.” She smiled gently when Sabrina looked up at her. “You are so wonderful with people and... and making them love you. You do not want to be like me. People scare me to death. I could not host a ball or even pour tea without messing it up.”

Shivering at the mere thought, Catherine caught sight of her own reflection in one of the numerous mirrors gracing Sabrina’s room. If only her hair held fewer streaks of the assorted autumn

colors. If only she was a bit taller and not so slender, she might be more at ease socially. Not one to dwell on what could never be, Catherine returned her gaze to her cousin.

“You are so very beautiful, you should live here, letting the best of London see you, and not in some strange land where they might not appreciate your beauty.”

“You are so kind,” Sabrina finally said as she squeezed Catherine’s hand. “But none of that will do me any good in this New York.”

Catherine could not bear her cousin’s sadness. There had to be something she could do. “Do you think it would help if I talked to Uncle Charles?”

“No,” Sabrina sighed deeply. “He swears it will be his way no matter what I wish.”

“Poor Sabi.” Catherine swiped at a tear of compassion,unaware she was about to cast her own fate. “I... I would go for you, if I could.”

“Would you really do that for me?” Sabrina asked hopefully.

Catherine gasped lightly, not certain whether Sabrina’s question was in jest. “Surely you don’t mean—” She watched Sabrina’s smile grow. “I could never be you! I... I would not know how to act or... or what to say.”

Sabrina’s tears miraculously stopped and she hopped up beside Catherine on the bed. “There would be no need to worry. I am to sail on a Dutch ship. No one will know me—or you.”

Catherine stood. She wrung her hands at the thought. "But the viscount... He is expecting Lady Thorpe. I'm just a poor relation. He'll know I'm not of the peerage."

"Yes, you are," Sabrina insisted. "Your father was born to gentility. He simply chose the small estate rather than wed a title."

Catherine lowered her head at the thought of the dear parents she had lost just three years before. "He loved my mother more than a title," she defended.

"I know, dear," Sabrina's voice softened. "And I know you hate London and society. What better way to escape it all than by taking my place?"

Catherine bit her lip. She did hate the many facades of the *ton*, but she was not comfortable playing a deceitful role. "This grand scheme will not work. Besides, I do not think I could do it."

"Of course you could. All it would take is a couple of fancy gowns and this." Sabrina shoved a ring at her that was meant to identify the prospective bride.

As she gazed into the green stone, Catherine allowed herself to truly think about it. She had no dowry. At best she might be married off to some well-to-do merchant or possibly an older peer who wanted a young wife to bear his heirs. Could this be any worse?

"It would be the biggest favor you could ever do for me, Cathy."

Hearing the name her father always used for her, Catherine swallowed hard. If she went to this New York and married the viscount, she would at least have someone. Even if he was the barbarian Sabrina claimed, she would still have her own home and, possibly, children to love.

“What about your father?” Catherine asked, tempted but still not sure. “He may make it difficult to... change places.”

Sabrina grinned. “Not if I ask him to let you accompany me to Dartmouth, or better yet, tell him you are joining me in America. He trusts you.”

Catherine winced. Her word was terribly important to her, and she would be betraying her uncle’s trust.

“It will not be a lie,” Sabrina quickly added, “We will both be traveling.”

No, it wasn’t exactly a lie, Catherine thought. And she had to consider she was fast approaching the age when no man may want her. At eighteen she was practically on the shelf. This might be her best chance. “What will you do there if you do not wed the viscount?” she asked, edging ever closer to her decision.

Sabrina grinned prettily. “I shall not be going to New York at all.”

Catherine gasped. “But Sabi, if you stay here how will you explain it to your father?”

“I will not be here, either,” Sabrina grinned. “I met the most wonderful man when I went to

Piccadilly. He is Spanish and wants to take me to his country. His name is Don Rafael and he is so handsome.”

Catherine could see Sabrina's eyes fairly dancing. “Do you love him?” she asked shyly.

“Oh, yes! That is why I have fought my father's marriage plans for me.”

Puzzled, Catherine was about to remind Sabrina she had only gone to Piccadilly a few days before, but decided against it. “Does he wish to marry you?”

“Of course!”

Somehow the plan seemed the right thing to do for both their futures. Catherine owed a certain allegiance to her cousin for all her kindness. By going to America in Sabrina's place, she could repay her cousin and also gain a home of her very own. “All right, Sabrina. I will go and marry this viscount, and you can be happy with your Don Rafael.”

Sabrina squealed and threw her arms about her. “Oh, Cat! I know it is going to be simply wonderful for both of us.”

“I am sure it will be,” she sighed and said a prayer everything would work out as easily as Sabrina made it sound. Catherine wasn't as sure as her cousin, but she would see the bargain through to the end. She closed her eyes and returned her cousin's hug. Surely she could convince an outcast from London society transplanted to the colonies

that she was Lady Thorpe long enough to become his wife.



“You’re looking quite well this evening, Catherine,” Charles Thorpe remarked.

“Thank you, Uncle Charles,” she smiled. “It is my new gown. Sabrina gave it to me.”

“The color becomes you,” he said gently.

Catherine touched the soft rose sleeve and smiled. “It is lovely.”

“And will be perfect for your voyage.” Charles smiled and reached to take Catherine’s hand. “Can you forgive me for not considering that you might wish to join Sabrina?”

“There is nothing to forgive, uncle,” she said softly. “You have always been kind to me.”

“Well, child, you are doing both of us a great service. You have no idea how pleased I was when Sabrina told me you wished to accompany her.” Catherine lowered her head. Her uncle placed his palm beneath her chin and lifted her face. “Your calm presence will help her through this.”

Catherine hated duplicity, but she had already given her word to her cousin. She had no choice but to follow it through, yet she found she could not speak the falseness of it all. Instead, she nodded her reply. A ruckus behind them drew her attention. She turned to see Sabrina coming down the stairs,

her maid still fussing over ribbons in her hair.

“I am too excited to sit still tonight,” Sabrina beamed as she waved away the maid. She hugged her father, then Catherine. “Now that you are coming with me, I am not so frightened.”

“You should have told me of your fears, daughter,” Charles smiled. “I thought you were simply bolting at my order. I know how you love to set your own path.”

Sabrina slipped her hand through the crook of his arm and turned on her charm. “I did not want to seem cowardly, Father,” she proclaimed. “After all, I am the daughter of a duke.”

Charles led them to a well-set table. They began their repast in an atmosphere of calm.

“Father,” Sabrina began after finishing the first course, “will you be sending much of my dowry when I sail.” Charles quirked a brow. “I only ask because I would like to assign some of it to Catherine.”

“I am pleased with your generosity,” Charles smiled. “But actually, child, I am not sending any of it with you.”

“What?” Sabrina gasped. Catherine noticed a scowl appear on her uncle’s face, but it disappeared when Sabrina went on. “I... I mean, do you not want to help poor Catherine?”

“Oh, I fully intend to see you both have sufficient traveling funds and I would be proud to bestow a decent dowry on our Catherine someday,

but your full dowry will not be sent until after you wed.”

“Because you do not trust me,” Sabrina pouted.

“No, daughter,” he sighed and leaned forward to take her hand. “Because I do not trust those damned Americans not to board your ship and strip it of any treasures. I will see the jewels and coin sent after this bloody war is over, and not risk losing it all together.”

“That does seem wise,” Catherine said softly to Sabrina. “I have read the papers and they say the American ships keep running the blockade. They could accost our ship.”

“I am sure we shall not be disturbed,” Sabrina said, her mood obviously still disturbed. “After all, that is the purpose of sailing on that dreadful Dutch ship, is it not?”

“As the Dutch are neutral, it seemed the best idea,” Charles explained. “You might be stopped by one of our ships to insure their neutrality, but there should be no trouble.”

Concerned with the sailing, Catherine tilted her head. “Then you think the voyage will be safe enough?”

Charles smiled gently. “My dear, I would not risk Sabrina or you. The lanes are clear of those miserable marauders along the northern sea. It is late enough to avoid the winter storms and early enough not to be plagued with ice breaking off the flows. You should enjoy your voyage,

Catherine. It shall be an adventure.”

She nodded sweetly at his encouraging words but her mind was filled with what was to come. The voyage was the least of her worries. It was the landing and meeting the man she was to wed. She already prayed the man would be kind. There was so much she didn't know. If he was patient with her, she would strive to make him a good wife.

“I find I can hardly wait to sail,” Sabrina smiled across at her.

“Yes,” Catherine smiled weakly, unwilling to reveal her concerns. “It should be exciting for both of us.”



Catherine sat in the chair before her small fire and sought warmth, but it was not forthcoming. She knew the chill radiated from inside her.

It was bad enough she had to pretend all was well in her uncle's presence, but trying not to let her apprehension carry over into her own thoughts was impossible. She had to admit the truth to herself. She was terrified. She was going to a strange land to wed a stranger.

She understood completely Sabrina's reluctance and her defiance of her father's wishes. Catherine had heard the gossip about the viscount. He was a womanizer and a murderer. Even though she knew he had been cleared, society never forgave him.

But what bothered her most was she was sure he would be expecting a willing bride—and she wasn't sure what that meant.

Her mother died before explaining wifely duties. She knew there was to be a physical union, yet she wasn't certain how that was to be accomplished. Perhaps Sabrina knew. Her cousin had so many beaux, she must have some idea. Sabrina had been kissed, at least. Catherine had once seen one young man slip his hand beneath the bodice of Sabrina's dress. Sabrina had smiled so it must have been pleasant.

The soft closing of a door nearby caught her attention. Catherine went to her door and slightly opened it to peer down the hall. She saw a caped Sabrina slip down the hall and out of sight. Catherine sighed and stepped back into her room. She hoped Sabrina wasn't going to jeopardize the coming trip. Although frightened at the prospect, Catherine wanted this chance at happiness and marriage.

Catherine lowered her lamp before she removed her robe. She approached her window to close it against the dampness. Something in the dark below caught her eye and she stepped back behind the drapery. Sabrina raced into the arms of a man. They disappeared into the barn. Catherine turned away at the sight. She prayed the young man was the Spaniard Sabrina had mentioned.



Sabrina slouched at the table over her breakfast. “I wish we had one more day.” She tried to hide a yawn. “I’m tired.”

“You should have thought of that last night,” Catherine chided. She saw Sabrina’s eyes widen. “I know you love Rafael, but you should have waited to see him in Dartmouth and gotten some sleep.”

Sabrina shrugged with a strange smile on her face. “If you must know, it was not Rafael I went to see.”

Catherine gasped. “Oh, Sabrina. You didn’t—”

“Of course not,” Sabrina replied quickly. “I am a bit nervous father might find out my plans before we leave. I could not sleep, so I simply went for a walk to relax.”

“But I saw you with... someone,” Catherine stammered, recalling the sight of the would-be lovers embracing.

“It must have been one of the maids and a stable boy. I came back in within moments. You must have fallen asleep and not heard my return.”

Catherine didn’t feel she had the right to question Sabrina, but something seemed strange. “Then why are you still so tired?”

“I could not sleep, even after my walk. I suppose I am too excited.”

Charles entered the room on that statement.

“Thank God you have accepted the situation, Sabrina” he sighed. “I was afraid you were going to hate me.”

Rising, Sabrina ran to her father and threw her arms about his neck. “Never, Father, no matter what happens.”

Catherine smiled at the pair. Their happiness made her decision to change places and become the wife of a renegade stranger seem almost rational.

Chapter Two



The coach carrying the two young women arrived at the first inn in the evening. Catherine found it hard to hide her growing excitement. She had never spent the night at an inn, let alone traveled the sea. Everything was new and peaked her curiosity. Sabrina, on the other hand, seemed bored and slept most of the trip. Catherine didn't mind. Her mind was so busy taking everything in, she didn't think she could carry on a normal conversation anyway.

About to exclaim her feelings aloud, Catherine drew back at the door to the inn. It was not crowded, so she could not help but notice the dark gentleman seated inside. Sabrina appeared anxious to enter.

“Rafael, darling,” Sabrina sighed aloud when she saw the stranger. She stopped and awaited him. “How wonderful you arrived the same day as we.”

He approached Sabrina and grasped her hands,

drawing them slowly to his lips in what seemed to be an overlong exchange. Finally recalling his manners, Rafael stepped back and reached for Catherine's hand. "And this must be your charming cousin to whom I owe much gratitude."

Catherine cast a suspicious glance toward Sabrina and frowned. This didn't feel like an unexpected tryst. She gazed at Rafael. He appeared surprised by something, but she couldn't fathom what it could be. Sabrina gave her no time to dwell on it.

"We are tired, Rafael," Sabrina announced as she pushed between the two to retrieve Catherine's hand. "We can take care of the amenities later."

As she dutifully followed Sabrina, Catherine felt someone watching her. She glanced back to see Rafael smiling. His gaze made her nervous, though why she didn't know. She turned and fled up the stairs.



The initially pleasant trip became a disaster after the Spaniard joined them. Sabrina became sullen. She often pouted, especially if he was the least bit kind to Catherine. The only cure seemed to be for her to withdraw into herself and let them chat together privately.

The next day, when the coach stopped at a

second inn, Catherine was assigned a separate room. She was pleased not to have to share, but she had still not had the chance to ask her cousin about the details of what went on between men and women once they were married.

She was sure there was another reason for the separation than the one Sabrina gave. And after watching Sabrina and Rafael together in the carriage all day, she wondered if the rumors she'd overheard from the staff at Winthorpe were true. Rafael seemed free with his hands and not once did Sabrina object. Catherine knew a woman was not supposed to let a man play loose with her until they wed.

Disturbed by appearances, Catherine felt a responsibility to remind her cousin of propriety, but not with Raphael around. After the inn had grown quiet, Catherine slipped on her robe and made her way to Sabrina's door. At the very moment she raised her hand to knock on the door, she heard Sabrina gasp. Terrified her cousin was in distress, Catherine opened the door. Her mouth dropped open. She quickly retreated in silence. With God's blessings, the lovers would never know she had been there.

The instant she was back in her room, Catherine threw the bolt and leaned her brow on the jamb, her eyes tightly closed. The image that appeared in the blackness haunted her. She fought confusion. Her cold hands raised to her burning

cheeks. For a moment she thought she should return. It was possible Sabrina was being forced. Fool, she scolded herself.

She ran to her bed and threw herself across it. Sabrina was using her. She had lied about Rafael. The two were lovers. She couldn't help but wonder what else had been a lie.

Sadness filled Catherine. Surprisingly, it was for the Viscount Kent. Had she not agreed to this trip, he would have been equally duped. It seemed as if she was destined to save them both. She from the prospects of an impoverished life, and he from the clutches of a soiled bride.

Catherine realized she was glad she didn't understand what was expected of her. Let the viscount teach her what he wanted her to know. In an attempt to banish the memory of her cousin straining against Rafael's dark flesh, she prayed her husband would not expect *that* from her!



The next morning, Catherine was surprised at Sabrina's admirable job of acting. Judging by appearances, one would never suspect she had bedded her lover so vigorously. Catherine was so disturbed by the pretense she could not bear to look at her cousin.

She was comfortable with the thought she had not been observed by the time Rafael joined them

at the table for the last repast they would share. She glanced up when he greeted her and gasped at the look of amusement on his face. He winked at her and she knew he had seen her.

Stunned and embarrassed, she lowered her head. Though they had to share the remainder of the journey until she boarded her ship, she refused to acknowledge him. Sabrina seemed well pleased with such an arrangement.

As the carriage finally drew up to the dock, Sabrina thrust the bold ring into her hands. "Now remember," she said, "he must see this ring or he will not accept you as me. We have never met and, to my knowledge, he knows of me only what his father told him."

Catherine nodded. She clutched the ring in fear. She had decided not to mention what she had seen to Sabrina. Her cousin had been good to her—and she was repaying her kindness with this voyage and marriage. The slate was clean. If Sabrina was determined to stray outside the perimeters of propriety, it was not her concern.

"I'll keep it with me always," she murmured, not daring to look into her cousin's eyes. She was too afraid her disappointment might show. Her luggage was sorted from Sabrina's and she watched as it was loaded on the squat ship she would be sailing. It was time to part company.

"Good bye, Sabrina," she said softly. "I hope you are happy... with your decision."

Sabrina took her hand and Catherine was forced to face her. Her cousin's smile seemed very sincere. "And may it work out well for you also, dear Catherine."

Catherine hugged her cousin and only friend. She had no right to judge. "It will," she sighed. "I am sure it will."

She moved to exit the carriage and frowned. Rafael was standing there waiting to assist her. She could hardly deny him without explanation and set her hand in his, shyly mumbling her gratitude. As she passed, he lowered his head close to her ear.

"I wish it had been you," he whispered softly.

Appalled, Catherine stiffened. She walked toward the ramp that led to the ship and her future. She didn't look back until she heard the wheels of the carriage squeaking. It was done. Her fate was sealed. She lifted her chin.

Lady Thorpe stepped aboard the ship.



It was difficult for Catherine not to become enraptured by the ship and life aboard it. Her cabin was small, but it fit her needs nicely. She chuckled when she saw how little room there was. Sabrina surely would never have survived the accommodations. There were no luxuries aboard, only necessities. Her meals were taken with the

captain and his first officers. She was nervous at first but the crew soon put her at ease. They attributed her nerves to it being her first time sailing.

“It is unfortunate your traveling companion left you to travel alone. She feared sea travel would not agree with her, I understand.”

Catherine smiled weakly at the captain. “I, too, must admit to some fears of my own,” she said honestly.

“I assure you, we should have no problems, Lady Thorpe. The weather may get cold, but we should not meet any storms this late in the winter,” the captain told her. “At least not until we near the coast. Then if we meet with foul weather, we can make for shelter at one of many ports.”

“And what of the privateers I have heard of?” she asked, still recalling the articles she had read in the London papers.

“We have a treaty with them. We will carry people and posted letters only. As a Dutch ship we are a threat to neither side. Your countrymen have also agreed to this. It is the only way they can communicate with one another, just in case they decide on peace.”

Catherine thought of the nearly two years since the war had begun in America. England was already fighting in France against Napoleon. With two fronts, things had been difficult, but there seemed little choice.

She was not sure how this war started. Some articles said the Americans accused England of impressing her seamen while others thought it was simply a means of aiding the French. Since the French were often accused of stealing American ships, she doubted it was the last. Either way, the new year of 1814 had seen the war continue.

“And what of the blockade?” she asked the captain, curious about reports heard dockside about the United States, as they preferred to be called.

“I have no doubt we will be stopped and checked.” He wiped his mouth after a sip of wine. “If you wish to send any mail back to England, you can give it to whomever halts us.”

“There will be no post,” she sighed. She had forgotten to get any contact place from Sabrina, and there was no one else.

“But your father, surely he will want to hear from you as to your safety.”

“I shall wait until I meet my... betrothed,” she shyly told him. “Only then will I know whether or not I have arrived safely.”



Catherine gripped the rail as she shivered with cold. Heavy winds stirred, causing the sails to pull at their riggings. They were rounding Cape

Cod on their southerly course along the American coast. She had spotted land several times and the small ship had been boarded and released twice.

She remembered to play her role well for the British captains. Fortunately, luck was with her. No one knew the real Lady Sabrina Thorpe. They had spoken of the duke with admiration and politely mentioned they had heard of her, but no overt comments were made and Catherine had been able to relax for the duration of the voyage.

Still she kept to herself for most of the voyage, afraid she would make some mistake that would draw attention to her beyond the fact she was the daughter of a duke.

She was sure the few other passengers assumed she considered herself above them, but she didn't care. When the ship landed, she would probably never see any of them again.

The wind shifted and a strong gust tossed the ship precariously to one side. A youthful sailor advised her to go to the safety of her cabin. She did, post haste. The sea was angry, and they were still almost two days out.

Sleep was impossible that night. She desperately clutched the sides of her narrow bunk in an effort to stay in place. But before the first streaks of dawn it was obvious the small Dutch ship was in trouble. Catherine overheard a seaman say the ship had taken on a great deal of water in the rolling sea. There was damage to the sails and the

ship responded too slowly to the wheel.

The captain finally suggested they had sailed far enough west to safely turn north in an effort to seek one of the fine ports of Massachusetts or Rhode Island. He had charts for the coast, he said, but there were a great many unnavigated areas between the ports. The question was whether the ocean bottom was sandy enough to aid survival chances should they run aground.

Catherine appreciated the man's honesty, but she was defenseless against the fear welling inside her chest, especially when the captain ordered passengers and crew topside. A person could be trapped below decks, unable to reach the deck in time to avoid going down with the ship, the youthful ensign explained.

Catherine stood in the center of her cabin for one more look around before she went topside. She clasped her hands to keep them from shaking. She could not believe they had crossed the hundreds of miles from England with no problems, then off the coast of her new homeland they were in peril. Was it an omen? Was this God's way of punishing her for the deceitful game she had joined?

The ship listed heavily to one side. Catherine gasped. With cape in hand, she was at the door when she stopped and turned around. She fought her way back to her bed, and searched beneath the pillow. She was not going to leave the ship without the one item she needed to survive in this new land.

Her fingers touched cold metal. Clasping it in her hand, she drew it to her chest like a talisman. A ring this large would never stay on her finger if she was tossed into the sea. The ribbon that held the end of her bedtime braid was yanked free and she fed it through the ring and tied it around her neck.

“I pray that if I am found, alive or dead, someone will tell him,” she sighed aloud. She owed the viscount that much at least.

A grating sound on the bottom of the ship gave her the impetus to make for the deck. Through driving rain and lashing wind she heard someone yell they could see land. With luck, they could survive.

The crew tried to launch a boat, but crashing waves drove it back against the ship until it was shattered like kindling.

“Into the water!” the captain cried above the roar of breakers slamming the ship. “Grab something that floats and hang on! Let the wind carry you ashore!”

Lady Thorpe watched her fellow passengers plunge over the side one by one. The water was already on the deck lapping at the feet of those who hesitated. Catherine stood frozen. Thoughts of her parents lost to the sea kept her from that first step. She found herself backed away from the rail. Just as she turned to run back to her cabin, someone gripped her arm.

“Come, m’lady!” A seaman shouted to her over the cacophony of splitting timbers and screeching winds. “I’ll help you.”

Catherine screamed as he tossed her in. She regretted the loss of oxygen the scream cost her as she slid beneath the cold, churning water. She kicked and fought, but could not reach the surface. She was ready to accept her fate when a hand grabbed her wrist and pulled her upward. She gasped fresh air into her aching lungs as soon as her head topped the water.

“Hold on to this,” the sailor instructed. He pushed a wooden plank beneath her arms.

She gripped it for dear life. When she turned to thank him, he was gone. Even with the water all about her and spilling over her, she knew she was crying. Whether it was for the valiant sailor or herself, she didn’t know.

Something hard slammed into her ribs. She screamed, almost losing her grip on the plank that was keeping her afloat. Water covered her again and again but pain helped keep her from falling into an oblivion of darkness and fatigue. A wave slammed her in the face and she sputtered. She couldn’t hold on much longer.

It was at that moment her foot brushed against something.

A surge of hope filled her. She tried desperately to find whatever it was she had touched. For several moments there was nothing. Then she felt

it again. Sand. It was the bottom. Unable to swim, she held on to the board. She could feel herself rising and falling in the surf. If she could just hang on, she would make it.

With the next ebb of the tide, her knee slammed into the bottom. It was impossible not to cry out in relief. As she got closer to the shore, she released the plank, knowing she could walk ashore, albeit with difficulty. Her feet found solid ground and she took a step.

The sand swirled about her feet, sucking at her trying to keep her captive. But she could see the beach ahead. Several other people were making their way ashore. There would be survivors—and she would be one of them.

A hand reached toward her. She missed it twice before she felt it wrap securely about her wrist. Someone else called out. It sounded like a warning, but she was too exhausted to care. As her rescuer hauled her ever closer to the shore, a huge wave crashed over her.

Excruciating pain exploded in her head. As though in a dream, she felt sand scrap against her cheek before she was lifted on the next wave. A blessed darkness slowly engulfed her.



“Is she dead?”

“No.”

“Which of the passengers is she?”

“Don’t know. Her face is so bloody, it’s hard to say.”

“We better get her to the wagon. They can figure it out in Newport.”

Catherine could hear the words, but they didn’t really register in her mind. She tried to speak, but her mouth refused to move. She struggled to open her eyes, but they would not respond either. Strong hands lifted her. She heard a scream. As she slipped into the void, she realized the sound came from her.



Ransom Kent’s horses were still skittish from the storm the week before. He’d had to work hard to get his favorite, Lucifer, to take the bit the next day—and every day since. Of course, it might be that the horse was defying him just to be stubborn.

When he had a moment, memories invaded his thoughts. Where he was now was a direct result of choices from his past. He knew part of the reason everyone condemned him so quickly after the duel in England was his prior reputation. Although he had his share of married women, Lady Marshant had not been one of them. Unfortunately, her husband chose to believe exactly what she told him. It had been a fatal mistake.

He had been bored with London for many months before the duel. The results of it had simply become his means to this America. He felt an affinity for this new country, perhaps because he was born the day the peace treaty was signed, finishing its war for independence thirty years before.

Lucifer's large black head tossed to gain his attention. "So you want to run, do you?" he asked the magnificent beast as he patted its sleek neck. "Then let's go." He kicked its flanks and the two swept joyously through the landscape.

He rode the edge of the palisade overlooking the fast flowing Hudson River below. The air, still chilled, was as invigorating as the land stretched about him. He followed the river until he pulled in the reins above a marsh.

Lucifer's breath was visible in the cool April morning. He seemed restless still. Ransom strained to gaze over the marshland. His ship was there. He knew it, yet he was pleased he could not spot her easily. Finally, he relaxed in the saddle.

The tall black mast of the *Ebony* would appear as a burnt tree jutting up into the foliage to anyone else. He knew this was a good place to hide his prized ship. Even though the tides dictated when he could move her, she was safe from the British and could wreck havoc when the need arose. No one would look for her here.

He leaned to brace his arm on his thigh and

thought of the previous night. With her black sails and hull, he had taken her down the river on the outgoing tide to intercept a British gunboat. He was able to get right up to it before the crew of the other vessel knew the *Ebony* was there. In less than an hour, his crew had disabled the smaller ship, stripped it of its guns, and caught the tide back up river.

He was proud of his ship and his crew. His men were unsung heroes for this new country. Everything they did was covert. They led normal lives by day and hunted by night, but they were having a positive effect on the war. He knew the guns they confiscated armed the ragtag troops trying to keep the British from reclaiming them.

Satisfied the previous night's raid had been totally successful, Ransom turned his horse back toward his house. The men should have stored the excess from the raid by now. Since half his staff at the Devil's Head worked on the ship, they were able to use the house as well as the ship in their endeavors.

As he made his way back to the stable, he could see his friend, Holden Blakely, standing near the door. He seemed to be concerned over something he held in his hand. Ransom could only guess it had to do with the arrival of his expected bride-to-be. Things had been going too well in his life, he mused.

"Well," he called to Holden, "has this Lady

Thorpe arrived?"

"Nope, and neither did her ship." Ransom raised one dark brow as he dismounted and handed his reins to the boy hired just to care for Lucifer. "It went down somewhere off Newport," Holden announced as they made their way toward the house.

Ransom stopped walking for a moment. He sighed heavily. "It seems the war has not claimed enough." As he stared across the landscape, Ransom's thoughts centered on the small ship and the place from whence it came. England. His father. Hard memories returned, making him scowl. "I hate the loss of life, yet I find myself relieved to be free of my father's mandate."

Holden shook his head. "Don't be too relieved. You may yet be a bridegroom. There were survivors."

Snorting in disdain, Ransom yanked off the black ribbon that held his shoulder length hair back and ran his hands through the thick mane. "There would be," he groaned, his head beginning to ache.

Inside, Holden poured two brandies and handed one to him. Ransom took the drink and gazed at his friend. Holden had been with him since before he arrived in America. From the moment they met in a West Indies tavern, both homeless and destined to drift, they formed a bond that grew stronger as they moved closer to their destiny. Ransom had

hired Holden as first mate on the second ship he bought. That ship had become the *Ebony*. There were several other ships, but they were awaiting the end of the war to resume their trade routes.

“We gonna go see if she was one of them?” Holden asked.

Sighing heavily, Ransom sipped his drink. “Do we have a choice?” Holden shrugged. “I didn’t think my luck would stay all good.” He set his glass aside. Slowly, he stretched his muscles until he felt his black silk shirt strain across his shoulders.

“I need a few hours sleep after last night’s raid. See if we can get a steamer from Nyack in the next day or two. We can take one of my ships from New York.” He yawned as he made his way to the door. “Give the men a few days off while we settle this,” he added. “No sense in all of us being made to suffer.”

Ransom scowled as he left the room. It was possible he would soon have a bride. If he loved his father less, or himself more, there would be no problem. He would simply turn his back and live the life he sought. But therein lay the rub. He climbed the stairs slowly. He hated England, but not as much as he loved his father.

Resolved, Ransom knew he would free his father of a large debt by marrying the duke’s daughter—if she still lived.

Chapter Three



“There were twelve survivors,” the doctor informed Ransom as they walked to the room where women patients were kept. “Three died from internal injuries within the first two days.” He opened the door and pointed to the far end of the room. “Last bed on the left,” he told him.

Ransom wondered how he would identify a woman he had never seen. He didn't even know her given name, but he had heard she was a beauty. Unfortunately, even that would not help. The doctor said the woman had been struck in the face by debris from the wreck. She would be bandaged.

As he neared the bed, he frowned. Beneath the blankets he could see the person was small, like a child. She was on her side, her back to him. Her hair was hidden beneath some sort of cap. There was nothing that even resembled a woman.

“Has she regained consciousness?” he asked, holding his voice steady.

“Not really.” The doctor checked to see if she

was even breathing. “From time to time she calls out for some viscount, but nothing else.”

Ransom gave up his title when he left England. Few knew of it, so he could disclaim knowledge of the title easily. But when the doctor reached into a small drawer beside her bed and withdrew a ring and a tattered ribbon, Ransom knew Lady Thorpe had survived.

“She was wearing this about her neck,” he handed the ring to her visitor and stepped back.

Turning the distinctive ring over in his fingers, Ransom sighed. “This is the woman I seek.” He ripped away the ribbon and slipped the ring on his finger. Ransom looked at his prospective bride, but there was no way to see beyond the bandages and swelling. What little he could see was either distorted or discolored.

For a moment, he pitied the woman. She had come so far at her father’s bidding. He knew she was escaping a scandal, yet she was as much a pawn as he. Damn the British for their stiff social rules. So she had been indiscreet; was that any reason to have her punished so severely?

“Will she live?” he asked, momentarily tender.

“I don’t know, Captain Kent,” the doctor sighed. “She’s weak and doesn’t seem to be making any improvements.”

Abruptly, he turned away from her and the sympathy he felt. Ransom left the room with long strides. Outside in the hall, he turned to the doctor.

"Can you find me a minister who will marry us?" he asked, his face a mask of indifference.

"Why... yes," he replied, clearly surprised by the request. "I think Pastor Williams would do it."

"See to it," Ransom instructed. He may not like his peerage or the heritage that bred it, but it was always there when he needed to assume authority.

The doctor nodded and made haste to do his bidding. Holden leaned against the wall, clearly amused with Ransom's arrogance. "What do you want to marry her for? She might die."

"True," Ransom shrugged, "but the debt will be paid and the promise met." He strode back and forth in the hall, his black Hessian boots beating a steady tattoo on the floor. "If she lives, it's done and I can get on with my life."

Half an hour later, the stick-thin pastor came running into the ward, his bible clutched in his hands and his black coat flapping about his thighs. "Captain Kent," he called. "I understand you have some need of me."

"Can you perform a marriage for me?" Ransom asked, not wishing to dwell on the amenities.

"That I can," Pastor Williams smiled. "The doctor informed me of the situation. It is a bit unorthodox, but under the circumstances I'm sure we can overlook any incongruities."

Ransom nodded. "Then let's get it done."

It was a solemn group standing around the bed.

Ransom took the woman's limp hand in his as the pastor recited the words that bound them together. There was an awkward moment when Pastor Williams asked for her first name, but Ransom got through it with a request she be shown the respect of her station rather than admit he didn't know. If the pastor considered an argument of the legality, Ransom's scowl silenced him.

When a ring was called for, Ransom removed the emerald from his hand and slid it on her finger. He noticed she closed her hand to grasp it the moment he did.

The pastor, obviously wrapped up in the glories of a wedding ceremony, extended his hand. "Congratulations, Captain!" he exclaimed. Ransom's frown made him blush and stammer. "I... I'm sorry, I—"

"Can we move her?" Ransom inquired of the doctor, dismissing the embarrassed clergy.

The doctor shrugged. "I can't see why not. We can do no more for her here. You might as well take her home. Perhaps you have someone who can care for her better there."

Fully aware the doctor would prefer she die somewhere away from the small hospital, Ransom instructed Holden to get some of his men. They would take her to the ship and sail back to New York. He considered leaving her there, but thought it best to ensconce her at Devil's Head. Should the woman live, it would

facilitate matters if he didn't have her wandering about the countryside seeking him.

Two of his men arrived quickly with a stretcher. She was so small, he could have carried her easily, but he might hurt her further. It was best she be handled gently—in case she did survive.

Without a word, he followed the men to her bed. Very carefully they lifted her, bedding and all. She moaned and Ransom couldn't help but wince. He was glad she was not awake to experience the pain of her injuries. Ridiculous. What was this to him? He shook off any momentary concern as he watched them take her away to his ship.

“This should cover the expense of her stay,” he stated and pressed a sum into the doctor's hand. The doctor smiled at the amount. “Holden, see to the documents.” Without another word, Ransom dismissed them all. He quit the room as quickly as his long legs would carry him.



Fortunately, it was only two days journey to Devil's Head. Ransom hadn't thought ahead to secure someone to see to his wife on the voyage, but Holden had found an old woman seeking passage to New York who would tend the lady for her fare.

Relieved of the responsibility, he kept to the deck. It was odd how her presence aboard brought

things to mind he had not considered for years. Perhaps it was because he didn't want a wife and now had one he didn't even know. But what could knowing her help? He had been betrayed by the same woman as Lord Marshant. Both men had known her. And it had cost the man his life and Ransom his heritage. He had no lingering regrets about his losses, but he often recollected how he had killed an innocent man because of the woman's duplicity.

His life had taken a positive turn after he arrived in America. He found a purpose and had pledged himself completely to this young country. But he would always bear the guilt of killing a man so a woman could wed her lover.

As he thought of his own past, he wondered what transgression his wife had committed. Had she been as devious as Lady Marshant? Had others suffered for what she had done? Or had she merely taken a lover and gotten caught? He couldn't help but cringe at the thought of how the man involved was probably still being applauded for his conquest even as the woman lay dying for the same sin.

He shook off the melancholia and strode to the wheel. "I'll take it for a while," he sighed. The watch stepped aside, relinquishing the right to his captain.

Ransom felt joy in the power of his ship as she made her way toward the city. This was the best of it, he thought. A good ship. A fine crew. The

wind and the sea as his companions. He didn't need this wife. He looked up at the billowing sails with a sigh. If this woman lived, he would leave her to enjoy her own life—as he intended to enjoy his.

For eight years he had kept his past buried. He didn't intend to have her as a reminder. She could live in New York or Philadelphia if she wished. For that matter, she could return to England when the war was over.

Holden came up to the bridge and stood beside him, his hands braced behind his back. "She's still hangin' on," he murmured with a note of admiration in his voice. Ransom remained silent. He added, "For a little thing, she's a fighter."

"Or she isn't as badly hurt as the doctor said."

Holden glanced at his friend. "You don't want her to be strong, do you?"

Ransom sighed, thinking of the way she kept his ring clutched in her hand. "I don't want her at all, but as I am stuck with her. I hope she will be happy to do as she pleases, expecting nothing from me."



After leaving his ship in New York, and transferring to the steam ship for the voyage up river, the trip was completed swiftly. Extra coin exchanged hands so the steam ship would stop at

the base of the hill below Devil's Head. Ransom wasn't so concerned with getting his wife settled as much as he was with leaving her behind so he could resume his schedule. There were guns to deliver along the river. Another shipment reportedly was coming within the grasp of the *Ebony*.

So deep was he in thought over his assignments, he could barely spare a moment to enjoy the magnificence of the river. Yet, with each trip, he still marveled at the beauty of the nearly vertical rock cliffs lining parts of the mighty river and the trees clutching desperately to the broken rocks at the base. He knew it well enough from memory by now. The new greens of early spring couldn't even entice his glance. Not until they passed the marsh did he divert his attention and focus on the shore to be certain his black ship could not be seen.

When his house became visible, he stared up at it. It was situated back from the river on a rise. He supposed it had been grand when well tended, but he had let it go. It wasn't that he didn't care for the place, its run-down grace kept visitors away. He knew they thought he was a slightly mad recluse and he took pains to nurture the image.

The small ship pulled up beside his private dock and Holden jumped ashore to secure it. The two men who had journeyed up river with them lifted the litter and carefully made their way up the path toward the house. Ransom followed, still

wondering if this was the right thing to do. As he neared the house and saw John Milton, his overseer, he realized it was too late to turn back.

“Call your wife, John,” he ordered, planning to leave the care of his new wife in her hands. There were few others he could trust. He kept his staff sparse to minimize the possibility someone should discover what went on there.

“Aye, Cap’n,” John nodded, going to the small house he and his wife occupied.

“Where do you want her?” Holden asked, having halted the men in the foyer.

Not sure if there were any rooms except his and Holden’s ready to receive a guest, Ransom paused. “Alice will be here in a moment. She can tell you where she wants to put her.”

He turned away, dismissing the entire episode as he made his way to his sanctuary. The library was his private domain and at the moment he needed it to rejuvenate his spirit.

He eventually heard voices and knew Alice was taking care of the situation. After a moment of quiet, there was a knock at the door. He called for his friend to enter and handed him a brandy as he neared the desk.

“She’ll be well taken care of,” Holden announced.

Ransom shrugged no commitment, then turned to a pile of papers on his desk. “We can still make the rendezvous with that arms shipment,” he said,

resuming his role as though nothing had interfered with it.

Holden leaned over to review the report. “And will we still make the run to New Orleans?”

“I can’t see why not. We’ll have guns and they need them.” Grinning crookedly, Ransom leaned back in his chair. “Should be fun.”

“Running a blockade could be called many things, but only you would call it fun,” Holden grunted and poured himself another drink. “Sometimes I think you have a death wish.”

“No, my friend,” Ransom sighed, “I want to live. But I’m not afraid to die, especially if I do so helping my new country.”

Holden lifted his drink in a toast. “Then to your success, my friend. Since I’ll be with you, I hope you live very long.”



“Such a little thing,” Alice muttered as the men lifted Catherine’s small body to the bed hastily prepared on the ground floor near the kitchen. After the men left, she began bathing the captain’s wife with a cloth.

Alice examined her injuries. “Don’t think it’s broken,” she muttered as she tested the bruised cheek. She drew the wash cloth close to Catherine’s black and swollen eye. “You been

banged up real good, girl, but I can't figure why you ain't wakin' up." Alice started to undo the buttons of Catherine's nightgown. "You should have rallied by now. Holden said the accident was—" Alice gasped. "My God! You look nigh on ta starvin'!"

Gently, Alice removed the soiled gown. She shook her head. "It's like they just figured ya'd die and here ya was too weak ta ask for somethin' ta eat and getting weaker all the time." Alice finished the bath before she bustled to the kitchen to demand a rich broth. "And make sure it has plenty of finely chopped meat and vegetables," she ordered.

"I ain't got nothin' ta make no broth with," the cook sniffed, hefting her bulk from a chair to pour herself a cup of tea.

"Then get it!" Alice snapped. "It's for the new mistress."

Beatrice cast a sidelong glance at Alice. "You daft? Ain't no mistress would come ta this place. If'n there was one, ya don't think she would stay with *him!*"

"I'm tellin' ya, Bea. If ya know what's right, ya better make that broth. When the lady mends—"

"Mends? Ya mean she ain't well?" Alice shook her head. "Then it's a waste of time, I tell ya. He wouldn't bring no woman here what was goin' ta live." Bea settled back in her chair. "I tell ya, it ain't worth the trouble."

Bea wiped her nose down her already filthy sleeve. Alice grimaced and left the room. Her short legs covered the distance to her own small but neat house. There was a rich chowder simmering on her stove.

“Ya should have a clear broth but this will have ta do,” she said to herself. Tray in hand, she finally made her way back to the little room and found Beatrice looking in on the girl.

“Don’t look like she’s gonna make it,” Bea sneered, backing away as Alice entered.

“She’ll make it,” Alice stated emphatically. “I’ll see she does, and then you can explain why ya wouldn’t help her.”

Beatrice grunted. “I’ll see ya gets some broth by dinner.”

Alice carefully eased the lady up enough to pour small amounts of the chowder into her mouth. “It might take some time, m’lady, but I promise ya, you’re gonna be just fine.”



“You’re doin’ fine, m’lady.” Someone placed a spoon at Catherine’s mouth and she swallowed involuntarily. “Even takin’ more broth. Why, one of these days you’re gonna just—” Catherine opened her eyes. “Oh, m’lady!” Alice exclaimed, placing the spoon aside. “You’re awake!”

Catherine tried to remember where she was

and what had caused her the pain she felt when she tried to speak, but she had so little strength it was all she could do just to keep her eyes open.

“Don’t try ta talk yet,” Alice said softly and took her hand to gently pat it. “Y’ve been awful bad and I’ve been working ‘on ya for two days already. Ya need ta build your strength.”

There was such kindness in the woman’s face. Catherine wanted to express her appreciation, but her face hurt every time she tried to speak. The only way to convey her thanks was to squeeze the woman’s hand.

“It’s all right,” Alice smiled with tears in her eyes. “I know. You’re tryin’ ta tell me you’re gonna make it, ain’t ya?” Catherine repeated the gesture and Alice laughed. “We’ll have ya chattin’ soon enough. For now, ya better see if ya can take some of this here soup before ya fall back ta sleep.”



Catherine was able to stay awake longer and longer over the next few days. Alice was her constant companion. She took care of her every need and chatted about any inconsequential topic she could think of—obviously trying to stimulate Catherine’s mind. Each day the woman asked for her name, but Catherine remained mute.

“Don’t ya worry,” Alice sympathized. “You’ll

be talkin' fine soon enough. The swellin' is goin' down nicely with the cold compresses." She went on about the bruises on her legs being nearly gone and that no sign of infection could be seen in the cut on her ribs.

As each injury was defined, Catherine remembered the events that caused them. She had no way of knowing how long it had been since the ship sank or where she was. For all of Alice's talking, she revealed very little. It was only when she lifted her left hand to wash it that Catherine groaned softly.

"Did I hurt ya?"

With supreme effort, Catherine slowly shook her head.

"Oh, ya thought ya had lost it, did ya?" she smiled. "I guess the Cap'n gave it ta ya, huh?" Catherine frowned noticeably. "Cap'n Kent," Alice explained. "Your husband."

Catherine closed her eyes. Her husband. The last thing she remembered about the ring was tying it about her neck on a ribbon. That it was on her hand was mystery enough, but how was it she had wed?

"We was right surprised when he came back with ya, especially since we didn't know he was plannin' on marryin'."

Slowly, Catherine opened her eyes. Somehow she was married to the man she was sent to, yet she had not seen him even once. Nor had he come

to see her. Something inside her resented the fact he had not checked on her. Was she so unimportant to him he never made the effort? “W... where—” she croaked, her voice a raspy replica of itself.

Clearly pleased with her effort, Alice smiled. “He’s away for awhile. He has ships ta see to and is often gone for long spells.” Alice paused as she reached for the tray. “Are ya up ta tellin’ me your name now, m’lady?”

Catherine drew a breath. “Catherine,” she whispered. “M— my name is Catherine.”

Alice clasped her hands together. “Thank the Lord!” she sighed. “Now I know ya really are gonna make it.”

After the initial strenuous effort, Catherine found it was easier to speak each time. She discovered she was able to sit up for a fair part of the day. Her meals also graduated to fuller fare. But the highlight for her came the day Alice told her they were going to wash her hair.

Catherine knew it was a sight and dreaded the time it would take to brush it out. Alice had managed to deal with some of the tangles before she regained consciousness. It had been braided to keep it out of the way, but it had not been washed for over a month.

Seemingly afraid Catherine would not be able to stand or even kneel, Alice called in the young girl hired to help out around the house. She was terribly shy and didn’t say a word as she helped

Catherine lean over the back of the chair.

Totally enthralled by the luxury about her, Catherine was silent as Alice went on about Catherine's hair and its unique color. "Like long shafts of wheat," she sighed. Catherine knew it would almost reach the basin on the floor from her position. She sighed when Alice poured clean water over it for a final rinse. "Some almost like moonlight and some the color of rich tea. Ain't never seen such a blending."

"I'm afraid it is not considered much of anything in London," Catherine murmured beneath the towels rubbing her head dry. "Only the palest blond is coveted."

"Huh!" Alice groaned as she began to draw a brush through the length of her damp hair, starting at the ends. "This kind of hair a man could get lost in."

Catherine thought of the man she now belonged to. "Does... does the viscount often stay away this long?"

"Ya mustn't call him that," Alice warned in a whisper. She turned to be sure the girl was gone. "He hates ta be reminded of his past. Ya can call him Cap'n or maybe he'll want ya callin' him by his Christian name, but never by his title."

Catherine frowned and was pleased when she realized her face didn't resent the motion. "I have to confess, Alice, I do not know his Christian name." Alice stopped her ministrations and

moved around to look down at her. "We... Our marriage, it was arranged by our fathers. I have never met his lordship— Ahhh, I mean the captain."

"Ya could call him Ransom. 'Tis his Christian name."

"I could not," Catherine stammered. "Not without having met him."

"Ya poor dear," Alice commiserated. "Comin' here ta marry a man ya don't even know and then havin' ta go through all ya have." She smiled gently, then stepped back to resume her task. "Well, at least ya got a fair lookin' man ta wed, and I think he'll be well pleased with you when he returns."

Catherine wanted to ask Alice to define 'fair lookin' man' but realized it didn't matter what he looked like. She'd had many days to ponder her fate with Ransom Kent and had come to the conclusion she meant little to him. Not once had there been a message from him inquiring about her. For all he knew she could have died.

"I do not think I will please him, Alice."

Alice frowned. "Course you'll please him. You're a pretty little thing and the Cap'n wouldn't of married ya if he was against it, no matter what his pa wanted."

Slowly Catherine lifted her head, eyes brimming with tears she didn't expect. "Then why has he not sent some word, some inquiry?"

Alice slipped her arm about Catherine's shoulder

and hugged her gently. “Give ‘em time ta get use ta being wed. He’s a good man, but he’s been alone for a long time.”

It was not the answer Catherine was hoping for, but it would have to do. Soon, the man who was her husband would return and it would be her task to see to easing his loneliness and her own.

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Her first book, *Scoundrel's Captive*, introduced her to the wonderful world of networking and travel. *Scoundrel's Desire* opened the doors to feminine bonding from all over the world. When not writing, she works full time, fishes whenever possible with her husband, and still keeps reading, researching and learning.

As an Administrative Assistant for Healing the Children, JoAnn feels she has the best of all worlds.

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* * * * * *Five Stars*
Affaire de Coeur

The last thing Ransom Kent wants is a bride. A woman cost him his peerage and his family in England. He's a rebel now, with a dangerous job to do for his adopted country. His word is all he has left to honor his father, so he agrees to an arranged marriage to the scandalous daughter of a duke.

Catherine Thorpe has no expectations of marriage in England and owes much to her cousin. She agrees to take her place as the expected bride and sails to a new life. She doesn't believe her impersonation will lead to romance and true love, but she didn't expect to become the Rebel's Bride.

Another great LionHearted read that kept me up all night. I loved it. Can you send me the hero?

B. K. Wines