

Praise for The Daughter of Highland Hall

"In *The Daughter of Highland Hall*, Carrie Turansky sweeps readers back into the early nineteen hundreds, to the glamour of London society as well as the desperate world of those struggling to survive in London's East End. This beautiful story is filled with endearing characters who will steal your heart and surprises that will keep you engrossed until the very end."

—MELANIE DOBSON, award-winning author of *Chateau* of Secrets and The Courier of Caswell Hall

"From London's East End to the royal presentation court, Carrie Turansky pulls back the curtain on Edwardian England in this sweeping new drama. *The Daughter of Highland Hall* will delight romance fans as well as those who like a peek behind the scenes into the lives of the elite and the people who serve them. A delight from the first page to the last."

—Carla Stewart, award-winning author of *Stardust* and *The Hatmaker's Heart*

"Giving vivid entry into an Edwardian England setting, from genteel ball-rooms to the gritty streets of London's East End, author Carrie Turansky has created a cast of multilayered, delightfully written characters I found engaging from beginning to end. *The Daughter of Highland Hall* is at its heart a story of personal courage, one sure to please fans of Turansky's *The Governess of Highland Hall*, as well as readers coming fresh to the series with this book."

—LORI BENTON, author of *Burning Sky* and *The Pursuit* of *Tamsen Littlejohn*

"From first line to last, *The Daughter of Highland Hall* is a sumptuous Edwardian feast, brimming with romance, history, and spiritual truths. Society and its glitter fade away as what truly matters comes into play. A delightful addition to the Edwardian Brides series!"

—Laura Frantz, author of *Love's Fortune*

"The Daughter of Highland Hall sweeps readers back to historic London where a cast of endearing characters work toward a heart-stirring cause. With excitement happening both upstairs and down, this charming romance is a beautiful addition to Carrie Turansky's Edwardian Brides series and a reminder that the greatest joys can arrive in the unlikeliest of ways."

—JOANNE BISCHOF, award-winning author of the Cadence of Grace series

"A debutante. A medical missionary. Two disparate worlds. *The Daughter of Highland Hall* celebrates God's ability to open eyes and soften hearts."

—Mona Hodgson, author of nearly forty books for adults and children, including the Sinclair Sisters of Cripple Creek series, the Quilted Heart novellas, and *Prairie Song*

"The Daughter of Highland Hall is a compelling Edwardian love story that crosses class divides, where characters learn that snagging a titled and wealthy spouse is not the first concern of life. Carrie Turansky's meticulously researched and beautifully written novel lifts the heart, drawing the reader closer to Christ and reminding her of the possibilities of a faith-driven marriage. Characters that inspire readers to rekindle their romance with the Lord of life as well as with their own husband... How many books can do that?"

— CATHY GOHLKE, Christy Award—winning author of *Promise Me This* and *Band of Sisters*

The DAUGHTER of HIGHLAND HALL

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CARRIE TURANSKY



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This book is dedicated to my daughter and son-in-law, Melissa and Peter Morrison. Their love for each other and their hearts to serve those who are in need is a wonderful inspiration to me and to everyone who meets them! But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

—MATTHEW 6:33

London, England April 1912

If she lived to be one hundred and five, Katherine Evangeline Ramsey would never understand why every debutante must begin the London social season by curtsying to the king and queen. Of course, she was excited to be presented at court and to take part in her first season. She had looked forward to it for years, however, mastering the required skills had proven more challenging than she'd expected.

But her aunt, Lady Louisa Gatewood, insisted that was how every well-bred young lady made her debut into English society and announced she was ready for marriage. Kate certainly hoped her aunt was right. Because marriage to the right man was the only way she would gain control of her life and create a future for herself.

Pulling in a deep breath, she straightened her shoulders and prepared to practice her curtsy once more.

Mr. Philippe Rounpear, her gray-haired dancing master, lowered his bushy, silver eyebrows and pointed his white-gloved finger at Kate. "You must float over the floor like a swan gliding across a lake." He gave a firm nod. "Try again, please."

How many times was he going to make her do this? Kate stuffed down her frustration and cast a heated glance at her aunt Louisa, who sat on a high-backed chair by the piano, taking on the role of King George V.

Her aunt stiffened. "Katherine, the only way you will gain a position in society is to take your training seriously."

"I *am* taking it seriously!" The words flew from Kate's mouth before she could stop them.

"Then you must conquer these presentation formalities and do them perfectly."

Kate swallowed the sharp reply rising in her throat, tugged her skirt aside, and stepped into her next curtsy.

Mr. Rounpear's voice rang out. "No, no! You look as stiff as a broom." He crossed the oriental carpet of her cousin William Ramsey's London drawing room and tapped her left shoulder. "You must relax your posture. Think grace, think poise."

Heat flushed her face. She looked past the dancing master at her younger sister, Penny, who sat next to their aunt, pretending to be Queen Mary. Penny's eyes danced as she waited for Kate to attempt her next curtsy.

Kate narrowed her gaze at her sister. Just wait. In two years you will be eighteen, and you'll have to prepare for your own presentation. You won't be laughing then!

Mr. Rounpear clapped his hands. "Miss Katherine, our hour is almost over. One more time, please."

"All right." Katherine blew out a breath and tried to relax her shoulders. She would get this right or expire in the process. She had to. Her future depended on it.

Lifting her chin, she stepped to the side, then crossed one leg behind the other, and slowly sank down in front of her Aunt Louisa.

"Better." Mr. Rounpear nodded. "Not perfect, but better. Now lower your head, count to three, then rise slowly."

Katherine's legs burned as she waited and then rose.

"Now take two steps to the right, and curtsy to the queen."

Katherine glanced at Penny and took the first step, but when she took the second, her foot tangled in her skirt. She gasped and her hand shot out.

Penny smirked and covered her mouth.

Katherine swayed, struggling to recover her balance.

Mr. Rounpear scowled. "Is that how you will conduct yourself at your presentation?"

"Of course not." Kate untangled her skirt and turned toward the

windows, frustration bubbling up within. This man was impossible! She would like to see him curtsy fifty times and never lose his balance.

"Face this way!"

Kate clenched her jaw and turned around.

"You must never turn your back on the royal family." He motioned toward Penny and her aunt.

"They are not the royal family, and neither are you!"

His eyes flashed, and he lifted his hand. "Very well. That will be all for today."

"Mr. Rounpear, please!" Aunt Louisa rose from her chair. "There's no need to cut the lesson short."

"It appears your niece is tired, and that has made her irritable."

"But Katherine's presentation is Friday."

"Yes, the time is short." The dancing instructor lowered his eyebrows and studied Kate. "I suppose I could come again on Wednesday at three o'clock."

"Yes. Thank you. We'll look forward to it." Aunt Louisa sent Kate a pointed glance and waited for her response.

Kate thanked Mr. Rounpear for the lesson, though it nearly killed her.

Louisa crossed the room and pulled the cord to summon the footman. He arrived and escorted the dancing instructor out. When the door closed, she swung around and glared at Kate. "There is no excuse for your rude behavior toward Mr. Rounpear."

Kate lifted her chin. "I don't see why he has to come back. I know how to curtsy."

"There is more to court presentation than learning how to curtsy."

"Of course, but he's so superior and demanding."

Louisa's nostrils flared, sending a warning. "You will have one more lesson with Mr. Rounpear, and I don't want to hear any more about it."

Kate's face burned. She clenched her hands, barely able to keep herself under control. But her aunt was her presentation sponsor, and if Kate didn't hold her tongue, she might lose her opportunity to be presented.

Louisa didn't seem to notice Kate's response, or perhaps she didn't care. She turned to Penny. "Have you tried on those two new dresses?"

"Yes, but the hem of the green silk is terribly uneven. Should we send it back to the dressmaker, or should I ask Lydia to fix it?"

"Goodness, you would think with the price I'm paying that dressmaker, she could at least hem a dress properly." Louisa motioned toward the open doorway. "I'm going to the Tremblys' for tea at four, and I need to change, but I suppose I have time to look at it."

"Splendid." Penny turned and dashed out of the drawing room.

"Penelope, slow down!" Louisa raised her hand to her chest and hurried after her. "This is not a racetrack!"

Kate shook her head as she watched them go, then turned toward the window. Sunlight poured through the tall panes, drawing her gaze up to the blue sky.

It would be a perfect afternoon for a ride. Of course, a tame promenade down Rotten Row in Hyde Park wouldn't be nearly as exciting as a highspeed race across the beautiful rolling hills at Highland Hall, her country estate in Berkshire.

That thought stopped her cold, and pain pierced her heart.

It wasn't her estate anymore.

It had been almost a year since her father's death, and when she lost him, she lost control of Highland as well. It wasn't right, but it was the law.

She had no brothers, and daughters could not inherit their father's title or the estate that was tied to it. So even though they barely knew him, William Ramsey—her second cousin once removed—had taken her father's title as baronet and become master of Highland Hall. Even worse, her father had named Cousin William to be her guardian until she married, and that had made her life very difficult these last few months.

Of course, her father had not left her penniless. Money had been put aside for her marriage settlement. But if she wanted freedom from her cousin's control and a home of her own, she would have to find a husband this season.

Which was exactly what she intended to do.

She crossed to the center of the room to practice her curtsy a few more times before tea. Perhaps without everyone hovering over her and criticizing her every move, she could relax and master the graceful movements she needed to impress the king and queen. And everyone else who would be watching.

Closing her eyes, she pictured the motions. Then she lifted her hand, stepped to the left, and sank down once more. Lowering her head, she counted to three, then slowly rose. There, that was better. She smiled at the imaginary queen. "Thank you, Your Majesty. I'm very pleased to meet you."

A giggle drifted in through the open doorway.

Kate glanced to the right, following the sound.

Six-year-old Millie, Cousin William's daughter, peeked around the edge of the doorway. Her ginger curls spilled over her shoulder as she leaned in.

A smile broke across Kate's face. "Millie, are you spying on me?"

"No, I'm just watching. What are you doing?"

"I'm practicing for my presentation to the king and queen."

Millie's blue-green eyes glowed. "You're going to the palace to see the king and queen?"

"Yes, I am. There will be two hundred other young women presented that day, but I'll have my turn to meet them, and you'll do the same when you're my age."

Millie's impish smile spread wider. "Really?"

"Of course." Kate's spirit lifted. Millie was right. Presentation at court was an exciting opportunity that would open the door to Kate's future. She shouldn't let her overbearing aunt or her gloomy dancing instructor squelch her happiness.

It was time to make the most of the day. She focused on her young cousin again. "Would you like to learn how to curtsy?"

"Yes!" Millie hurried across the room toward Kate.

"All right. Stand like this." Kate showed her young cousin the first position.

The little girl watched Kate with eager expectation, then lifted her skirt and followed along.

• • •

Jonathan Foster hopped down from the London omnibus and set off across Hathaway Court, a broad, tree-lined street in the heart of Kensington. The late April sunshine warmed his shoulders, and the fresh spring breeze carried a faint floral scent. What a perfect day.

The pleasant spring weather wasn't the only reason for his cheerful mood. In less than two weeks, he would finish his fifth term at medical school, and he could enjoy a bit more freedom and a lot more sleep for the next few months.

Jon glanced at his watch. He didn't need to be back at St. George's Hospital until seven this evening. That gave him plenty of time to call on his sister, Julia, and her future husband, Sir William Ramsey, and welcome them to London.

Although their parents were in favor of his sister's upcoming marriage, Jon wanted to become better acquainted with William and be sure he was the right man for Julia. Ramsey might be a baronet and master of a large country estate, but it was Julia's recent inheritance from their grandfather that had saved Highland Hall from financial ruin just two months earlier.

Did William truly love Julia, or had he pursued her for the inheritance? With their father still recovering from a prolonged illness and living miles away in Fulton, Jon wanted to make sure his sister was protected and her future secure.

He rounded the corner, and Ramsey House came into view. He studied the impressive three-story Queen Anne–style home built of red brick. It had white trim, an intricate dutch gable with a scrolled roofline on the left, and a large round turret at the corner on the right. Another arched gable sheltered the front entrance.

He stopped at the wrought-iron gate and surveyed the property. Two well-kept flower gardens and neat boxwood hedges lined the walkway leading to the front door. They added a warm welcome and softened the formal appearance of the house. He was sure his sister appreciated that.

William Ramsey's London home was certainly different from Jon and Julia's simple childhood home at the mission station in India—and the thatched cottage where their parents now stayed in Fulton. His sister would lead a very different life here. But he imagined she would accept those changes with the same grace and goodwill she had always shown.

Still...was this marriage what was best for her? Would she be happy here? That's what he needed to discover.

He pushed open the gate, mounted the steps, and rang the bell.

A few moments later, a stout butler in a neatly pressed black suit answered the door and ushered him in. "Please wait here, sir." The butler motioned toward a chair in the entrance hall.

"Thank you." Jon removed his hat and glanced around as the butler passed through a doorway at the end of the hall.

The interior of the house was even more impressive than the facade, with beautiful hardwood floors, thick carpets, and an elaborately carved wooden staircase leading up to the next floor. A large mirror in a gilded frame hung on the wall to his right between two large family portraits. He stepped closer and examined one of the paintings.

Could that be William Ramsey when he was a boy? The young lad had the same features as the man he'd met at his sister's engagement dinner at Highland Hall in February. Two boys stood with him. Jon guessed they were his brothers. A younger sister and their parents sat in front of them in a garden setting. If that boy in the middle was William, he looked rather somber, even as a child.

A soft female voice followed by a little girl's giggle drifted from the partially open doorway down the hall.

Jonathan tipped his head and listened. Was that Julia with Sir William's daughter, Millie? Julia had grown very fond of Sir William's two young children since she'd become their governess at Highland Hall six months ago. And in a few months she would become their stepmother.

"Very nice, Millie. Let's try it again."

No, that wasn't Julia's voice. Perhaps it was Katherine Ramsey or her

sister, Penelope. Jon had met William's cousins at Julia's engagement dinner at Highland, and he had seen them again at William's sister's wedding earlier this month.

"Show me again." Millie's young voice carried a smile.

"All right. Follow me."

Jonathan moved closer and looked into the drawing room. The plush furniture had been pushed back. Katherine Ramsey stood in the center of the room wearing a sky-blue dress, with Millie standing beside her. Katherine's back was to the entrance hall, so she didn't see him step into the doorway.

Katherine lifted her skirt a few inches and exposed a bit of ruffle around her slim ankles. "Step to the left and place your right foot behind. Then slowly sink down until your knee almost touches the floor, but not quite."

Millie copied each movement, though hers were not as smooth as Katherine's.

"Now, lower your head." Katherine demonstrated and Millie followed. "Hold perfectly still while you slowly count to three before you rise."

Millie wavered, then gasped and tipped to the side.

Katherine lunged to catch her, but Millie crashed onto the carpet, and Katherine landed in a heap beside her.

Jonathan dashed across the room. "Miss Ramsey, are you all right?"

She looked up at him, and her cheeks flushed bright pink. "Mr. Foster... Yes, of course, I'm fine."

Millie giggled as she pushed herself to her hands and knees and then stood. "I guess I need more practice."

"I suppose I do as well." Katherine started to rise.

Jon extended his hand to her. "Please, allow me."

She glanced up at him, her eyebrows slightly arched. "I promise you I've curtsied dozens of times today, and this is the only time I've fallen."

"Of course. I'm sure it was only because you were trying to help Millie. Now, please, let me be a gentleman and help you." He smiled and continued to hold out his hand.

She hesitated a moment, then reached out and clasped his fingers. He helped her to her feet, then she slipped her hand from his.

"Thank you." As she looked down and brushed off her skirt, Jon had a moment to observe her more carefully. Her long, golden-brown hair was tied back with a blue ribbon that matched the color of her eyes. One wavy strand of hair had come loose when she fell. She reached up and tucked it behind her ear, her hand grazing her flushed cheek.

His gaze drifted from her cheek to her full, pink lips.

She looked up. "Mr. Foster?"

He swallowed and looked into her eyes. "Yes?"

"Have you come to see your sister?"

"Yes."

She glanced over her shoulder and then back at him. "Does she know you've arrived?"

He blinked, struggling to find an answer. "Yes."

She searched his face with a slight frown. "Mr. Foster, are you quite all right?"

"Yes." He shook his head and looked away. What was the matter with him? "The butler asked me to wait in the entrance hall, but I heard your voice and thought you were Julia, so I looked in. Of course then I realized you weren't Julia... You were you." His neck warmed. He was rambling on like an idiot.

A hint of amusement lit her eyes. "Well, we're very grateful you came to our aid, aren't we, Millie?"

The little girl nodded, her curls bobbing on her shoulders. "Are you staying for tea?" Millie looked up at him with a friendly smile and wide, innocent eyes.

He glanced at Katherine.

"Yes, of course. You're welcome to join us for tea. I'm sure Cousin William and Julia will be down soon." She placed her hand on Millie's shoulder. "Why don't you go tell them Mr. Foster is here?"

Millie nodded and turned to go just as William and Julia walked into the drawing room with Andrew, William's eleven-year-old son.

"Jonathan, what a wonderful surprise." Julia crossed the room and greeted him with a kiss on his cheek. "I'm so happy to see you."

"Thank you. I'm very glad to see you as well. Welcome to London." He shook hands with William and turned to Andrew. "How are you, young sir?"

"Very well, thank you." The sturdy little fellow's face was covered with freckles, and his red hair was an even brighter shade than his sister's.

"We hope you're still coming to dinner on Thursday," Julia said.

"Yes, I'm looking forward to it. But my classes were canceled this afternoon, so I thought I'd stop in and say hello."

"That's wonderful." Julia turned to Katherine. "Thank you for entertaining Jonathan while he waited for us."

Katherine shot him a questioning glance, and he returned a reassuring smile. Her secret was safe with him. He would not mention her fall.

"Yes, Katherine and Millie were very kind and...quite entertaining."

"We invited him to stay for tea," Millie added with a proud smile.

William touched his daughter's shoulder. "That was very thoughtful, Millie."

Millie looked up at her father, soaking up his praise.

"Yes, please stay for tea and tell us all your news." Julia took his arm and led him out of the drawing room.

As they crossed the threshold, he glanced over his shoulder at Katherine. Her gaze connected with his for a split second, then she looked away, a hint of a smile on her lips.

• • •

Kate took a sip of steaming hot tea and glanced across at Jonathan, who sat opposite her in the library. He stirred sugar into his tea, his movement smooth and relaxed. The discomfort he'd shown earlier in the drawing room seemed to have disappeared, leaving Kate wondering, *What was that about?*

Julia poured a cup of tea and passed it to William. The children were gathered around a small table near the library fireplace.

William helped himself to a scone and glanced at Julia. "Won't Penny and Louisa be joining us?"

"They've gone to call on the Tremblys, and then they plan to stop at the dressmaker's on the way home."

William lifted his dark eyebrows. "More dress fittings?"

"An adjustment was needed on the hem of one of Penny's gowns."

Kate nibbled on a lemon tart and glanced at Jonathan again. His blue eyes looked very similar to his sister's. But his hair was light brown with a touch of gold rather than dark brown like Julia's. He had pleasant features with a high forehead, straight nose, and a strong, square chin. With his broad shoulders and athletic build, he would be considered quite handsome by most women.

That certainly didn't matter to Kate. She knew what she was looking for in a husband. She and her aunt had discussed it at length. If Kate hoped to gain a place in society, she must marry a wealthy man from an aristocratic family, preferably one in line to inherit a title and estate. Of course, he would also be handsome, with pleasant manners and fine character, but that went without saying.

Jonathan looked up and smiled at her, with an invitation to friendship in his eyes.

Was it right to judge a man so quickly because of his lack of fortune and family connections? She looked away, dismissing the slight wave of guilt that pricked her conscience.

William set his plate aside and settled back in his chair. "The stories in the newspaper about the *Titanic* have certainly been tragic."

Julia glanced at the children, concern in her expression. But Andrew and Millie were enjoying their fruit tarts and sandwiches and didn't appear to be listening.

"Did you know anyone on board?" Jonathan asked.

"I went to school with Kirby Brumfield. We belonged to the same club." William lowered his voice. "His wife and two children were rescued, but he was not."

Sorrow flooded Julia's expression. "It's such a tragedy. We must pray for them all."

Jonathan nodded and looked across at Kate. "Have you read the articles about the *Titanic*, Miss Ramsey?"

The temptation to say she had rose in her mind, and her face warmed. A few months ago she would've easily lied to give a better impression, but since Julia's arrival Kate had been learning the value of telling the truth, even when it reflected poorly on her.

She lifted her eyes and met Jonathan's gaze. "No, I haven't."

He studied her for a moment with a hint of disappointment in his eyes, then glanced down at his teacup.

Regret washed over her. Of course she'd heard about the *Titanic* sinking a week earlier, but with their move to London, the dress fittings, and her preparations for the season, she hadn't thought much about it. But now, hearing how William's friend had lost his life, the tragedy seemed more real—and her lack of concern, more shameful.

Julia shifted in her seat and glanced at Andrew and Millie again. "Perhaps we should talk about something else. I don't want to upset the children."

"You're right, dear. That's a topic for another time." William turned to Jonathan. "How is your training coming along at the hospital?"

"Very well. Making rounds with the doctors and observing surgeries is much more helpful than sitting in a classroom or pouring over textbooks."

Julia nodded looking pleased. "You always have liked learning from practical experience."

"That's true." Jonathan helped himself to a small sandwich. "How are your plans coming for the season?"

"Katherine's presentation is Friday." Julia smiled at Kate. "I'm sure she'll receive several invitations after that. We expect to have a very full calendar."

Jonathan turned to Kate. "This Friday?"

A bite of lemon tart stuck in her throat. She nodded and forced a slight smile.

"And her ball is planned for the eleventh of May," Julia said. "We hope you'll be able to come."

"Of course. I'd be honored to." Jonathan glanced around the room. "Will you be holding the ball here?"

"We planned to." William frowned and shook his head. "But Lady Gatewood, Katherine's aunt, insists there's not enough room. We have over one hundred and fifty guests on the list."

A thrill ran through Kate, and she couldn't hold back her smile. "Aunt Louisa helped us make arrangements to hold it at Sheffield House. They have a large ballroom with a lovely terrace and gardens."

"Katherine's aunt is friends with the Tremonts, who own Sheffield," Julia added. "They've been very kind to allow us to host the ball there."

Jonathan focused on Kate with a slight smile. "I've never been to a debutante ball."

"It should be wonderful."

"I'm sure it will be." Julia turned to Jonathan. "So, when will you finish your classes?"

"Just two more weeks. Then I'll start two mornings a week at the hospital for the rest of the summer."

"That should be a nice change for you," Julia said.

"Yes, I'm looking forward to it, although I'll have to hunt for a new flat right away."

Julia tipped her head. "You're moving?"

"I must. The owner of our building is selling the property. I have to be out by the fifteenth of May at the latest."

William frowned. "That's certainly short notice."

"Yes, it is. Theo Anderson, one of my fellow students, invited me to stay with him, but I'm afraid his flat is even smaller than mine. I'm not sure how well that would work."

"Why don't you stay here?" William set his plate aside and continued. "We have four guest rooms, and we're not expecting to fill them all."

Kate darted a glance at Jonathan. She supposed having him stay with them wouldn't be too awkward, but what would people think? Of course, with her aunt, cousin, and Julia as her chaperones, even London's scandalloving society shouldn't object. "Sarah and Clark will be coming to town for Katherine's ball," William added, "but they're only staying for a few days. We don't return to Highland until early August. You're welcome to stay with us as long as you'd like."

"Thank you. That will give me plenty of time to look for a new flat before classes start again in the fall."

"How soon would you like to bring your things over?" William asked.

"I could come tomorrow, if that fits in with your plans."

"Excellent. We'll send the car around. Just name the time."

"Would three o'clock be convenient? I have a trunk and a few boxes of books, so it would be very helpful."

William nodded and set his teacup on the table. "I'll ask Lawrence to arrange it."

Julia's expression brightened as she looked from William to Jonathan. "It will be wonderful to have you here with us."

Jonathan offered them both a grateful smile. "It will be a pleasure, and it should give me a chance to get to know William and the rest of the family." His gaze shifted from William and Julia to Kate.

Kate looked down at her plate. She doubted she would see much of Jonathan Foster after her presentation. Once the season moved into full swing, invitations would pour in, and her days and nights would be filled with parties, dinners, balls, and outings. She glanced at Jonathan once more, and a twinge of regret traveled through her.

• • •

Lydia Chambers hurried down the back stone stairs, carefully carrying Miss Katherine's large lavender hat. Perhaps Mrs. Adams, the housekeeper, would know how to reattach the ostrich feathers that had somehow come loose on the trip from Berkshire to town.

Lydia heaved a sigh as she passed the main floor landing and continued downstairs. She'd been so happy with her promotion from Highland housemaid to lady's maid for Miss Katherine and Miss Penelope. The idea of traveling with the Ramsey family to London had been thrilling for a simple farm girl, but now she had a whole new set of responsibilities: fixing

the young ladies' hair, caring for their clothing, and even sewing their undergarments.

There was much to learn! And if she didn't do it well, she'd be demoted back to housemaid and find herself on the next train back to Berkshire.

Had she been a fool to accept the promotion?

She bit her lip and knocked on Mrs. Adams's door.

"Come in."

Lydia opened the door and stepped into the housekeeper's cozy parlor. "Good afternoon, ma'am."

Mrs. Adams turned in her chair. "What can I do for you, Lydia?"

"Miss Katherine wants to wear this tomorrow." She held out the hat and pulled out the three ostrich plumes. "And I've no idea how to get these blessed feathers back in place."

A hint of a smile touched Mrs. Adams's lips, and her eyes crinkled at the corners. "Let me see it." Lydia handed her the hat, and Mrs. Adams turned it in her hands, inspecting the flowers, feathers, and netting. "My goodness there's quite a garden here, isn't there?"

A smile tugged at Lydia's lips. "Yes, ma'am."

"Well, you've come to the right place." Mrs. Adams looked up, her soft gray eyes shining. "My mother was a milliner, and I grew up making hats. I'll show you how to fix it."

Lydia clasped her hands. "Oh, thank you. I thought I was going to be sacked before I finished my first week in London."

"Don't worry, my dear. By the time we're finished, Miss Katherine could wear this hat in the worst windstorm and never lose a feather."

"I'm ever so grateful. I really do want to learn to be a proper lady's maid."

"Of course you do, and I'm happy to help. Now let me find what we need, and then we'll take it to the servants' hall. It's almost time for tea." Mrs. Adams handed Lydia the hat, then took her sewing basket from the shelf in the corner. She motioned toward the door. "After you, my dear."

Lydia's tense shoulders relaxed as she walked into the servants' hall and took a seat at the long wooden table. Most of the other servants had

already gathered there and were enjoying their tea and a short break from their busy day.

Ann Norton, the nursery maid, looked up and smiled as Lydia settled in next to her. "You better watch out for that hat. You don't want to get jam or tea on it."

"You're right about that." Lydia carefully laid the hat in her lap. "I wouldn't have brought it in, but Mrs. Adams is going to show me how to fix the feathers." Lydia glanced across the room at the housekeeper.

Mrs. Adams stood at the head of the long table, speaking in a low voice to Mr. Lawrence, the butler. Together they oversaw the staff. Mr. Lawrence took charge of the male servants, including the two footmen, the chauffeur, and a groom. Mrs. Adams watched over the female servants, two house-maids, Ann, and herself.

Mrs. Murdock, the cook, bustled in and set a tray of sandwiches on the table. She frowned at Nelson, the footman, who was already eating. "You're certainly in a hurry. Couldn't you wait for the rest of us?"

"Sorry." Nelson glanced at Mr. Lawrence.

The butler turned to Mrs. Murdock. "I told them to go ahead. We have quite a bit to do, and I saw no need to wait."

Mrs. Murdock rolled her eyes. "Oh well, that explains it."

Lydia and Ann exchanged a smile. Since their arrival in London, Mrs. Murdock and Mr. Lawrence seemed to be testing each other, trying to determine who was truly in charge at the meals. Although Mrs. Murdock oversaw two kitchen maids and all the meal preparations, she still answered to Mrs. Adams and Mr. Lawrence.

Each one had their place and knew they needed to keep to it and show the proper respect to those above them.

Ann glanced at the housekeeper. "That's nice of Mrs. Adams to help you with the hat."

"Yes, she's kind." Lydia leaned closer. "Ever so much nicer than Mrs. Emmitt."

Ann's lips puckered as though she'd tasted something bitter. "I'm glad we won't be taking orders from her when we go back to Highland."

"So am I."

Mrs. Emmitt, the previous housekeeper at Highland, had tried to sack Ann last winter when she'd been caught alone with Peter Gates, a former groom. But Miss Foster had spoken up for Ann and convinced Sir William to overrule the housekeeper and keep Ann on.

Ann brushed a breadcrumb from her apron. "It's good the truth about Mrs. Emmitt finally came out. Imagine, her trying to get rid of Miss Foster."

Lydia shook her head. "She ought not to have done that."

"Especially since Miss Foster and Sir William had feelings for each other."

"It's quite romantic, isn't it—a fine gentleman like Sir William falling in love with a governess?"

Ann shrugged one shoulder. "I suppose. I'm just glad Mrs. Emmitt was the one who was sacked instead of Miss Foster or me."

The staff had been told Mrs. Emmitt had resigned and gone to live with her sister in Bristol, but the truth had been whispered from one servant to the next, and few were sorry to see the old housekeeper go.

Lydia carefully poured herself a cup of tea, making sure not to splash any on Miss Katherine's hat. "Do you think Mrs. Adams will be coming back to Highland, to replace Mrs. Emmitt?"

Ann shook her head. "I heard she has two daughters and a grandchild here in town. I doubt she'd want to take a job so far from her family."

"Well, they'll have to find someone to run the house."

Ann spread butter on a slice of bread. "I wish I could apply, but they probably want someone with more experience."

Lydia nodded. "It's a big job to manage a house like Highland."

Patrick, the second footman, walked into the servants' hall. His light brown hair was neatly combed, and he wore a smart livery. "The afternoon post, sir." He handed Mr. Lawrence a stack of envelopes.

"Thank you." Mr. Lawrence quickly sorted through the pile and set most of the letters aside. He looked down the table. "Lydia, you have a letter."

Lydia hopped up to accept the envelope from the butler. "Thank you, sir."

He nodded and passed out two more pieces of mail.

Lydia glanced at the envelope and her spirit lifted. Letters from home were a rare treat, and she eagerly tore open the envelope. She unfolded the one sheet of paper and scanned the first few lines. Her breath caught in her throat as she quickly read the rest.

Your sister Helen has run off, and we are heartsick and so worried. We have no idea who she is with or where she's gone. Have you heard from her?

Your father has spoken to some of the young people in the village and nearby farms. He even offered a reward. No one has come forward yet, but we hope someone will speak up soon. I feel certain one of them knows where she's gone.

Please pray for her and for us. Your father is beside himself, and my heart is breaking. If you hear from her, please send word right away.

I hope you are well and you are able to learn all that's needed in your new position. There are many temptations in London. I hope you will avoid them all and stay on the straight and narrow path.

Your loving Mother

Lydia's hand trembled as she stared at her mother's script. Why would Helen run away? Of course, life on the farm was not easy, but how could she just up and disappear without telling their parents? Where would she go? How would she live?

If she longed to leave home that much, why didn't she take a respectable job in service with a good family, rather than running off and causing so much trouble for their family? But Helen had always been a romantic soul and longed for the day when a young man would woo her and whisk her away to a charmed life.

Foolish girl!

Lydia folded the letter and slipped it back in the torn envelope.

"Lydia? What's wrong?" Ann leaned toward her. "Is it bad news?"

Lydia swallowed and looked around. She couldn't speak of her sister's troubles here in the servants' hall, not with everyone listening.

Ann reached for her arm. "Goodness, your face has gone as white as a sheet."

Lydia pulled away and stood, but her legs felt shaky. "I'm all right. I just need...some fresh air." She turned and strode out of the servants' hall.

"But what about Miss Katherine's hat?"

"I'll come back for it." Lydia hurried down the hall, then pushed open the back door. Stepping out to the rear courtyard, she squinted against the late afternoon sunlight. The smell of horses and hay drifted from the open stable door past the carriage house.

She leaned against a stack of wooden crates and tried to still her racing thoughts.

Oh Helen, what have you done?



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