



The
GOVERNESS
of
HIGHLAND
HALL

✿ A NOVEL ✿

CARRIE TURANSKY

The
GOVERNESS
of
HIGHLAND
HALL

BOOKS BY CARRIE TURANSKY

NOVELS

Snowflake Sweethearts

A Man to Trust

Seeking His Love

Along Came Love

Surrendered Hearts

NOVELLAS

Christmas Mail-Order Brides

Kiss the Bride

A Blue and Gray Christmas

A Big Apple Christmas

Wedded Bliss?

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MULTNOMAH
BOOKS

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This book is dedicated to my husband, Scott Turansky, whose love and encouragement have freed me to write the stories of my heart.

You are the inspiration for every hero I write.



*Many waters cannot quench love;
rivers cannot sweep it away.
If one were to give
all the wealth of one's house for love,
it would be utterly scorned.*
—SONG OF SONGS 8:7

*Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.*
—MATTHEW 5:8

October 1911, England

Julia Foster lifted her gaze to the clear October sky as a lark swooped past. Her steps slowed and her thoughts took flight, following the bird as it dipped into the golden trees beyond the meadow. If only she could fly away, back to the familiar life and cherished friends she had left behind in India. But that dream would have to wait.

She shifted her gaze to the country lane rising before her. Around the next bend she would see Highland Hall. At least that was what she remembered, but twelve years had passed since she had attended a charity bazaar at the large estate before her family left for India. What if she had misjudged the distance or the time it took to walk from the village of Fulton to Highland Hall? She quickened her pace. It wouldn't do to be late for her ten o'clock appointment with Mrs. Emmitt, the housekeeper.

When she reached the top of the rise, she spotted an expensive-looking navy-blue motorcar with a black roof pulled to the side of the lane. A tall man, who had discarded his jacket and rolled up the sleeves of his white shirt, stood over the open hood. He reached in and pulled on something, then bent lower and scowled.

She considered walking past since they had not been introduced, but her conscience would not allow it. Stopping a few feet away, she cleared her throat. "Excuse me, sir. Do you need some assistance?"

He turned and glared at her. "Assistance?" His dark eyebrows rose to a haughty slant. "I suppose you know something about car engines?"

Julia lifted her chin, suppressing the urge to match his mocking tone. “No sir. But I’m on my way to Highland Hall, and I could ask someone there to come and help you if you like.”

He huffed, grabbed the rag lying on the car’s running board, and wiped his hands. “It won’t do any good. No one there knows a blasted thing about cars.” He tapped the gold Highland insignia on the door.

Julia stepped away, more than happy to leave the brooding chauffeur behind.

“Wait, you say you’re headed to Highland Hall?”

She turned and faced him again. “Yes, I have an interview with Mrs. Emmitt.” Perhaps if he knew she might soon be working for Sir William Ramsey, the new master of Highland Hall, he would treat her with a little more respect.

He narrowed his deep blue eyes and assessed her. “An interview? For what position?”

She looked away, debating the wisdom of continuing the conversation with a man who wasn’t civil enough to introduce himself.

“It’s all right. You can tell me.” He nodded to her, obviously expecting a reply.

“If you must know, I’m applying for the position of governess.”

A look of disbelief flashed across his face and the scowl returned. “You look too young. Do you have any experience?”

She straightened, trying to add another inch to her petite stature, but she was still at least a foot shorter than he. “I’ve been teaching children for nine years.”

“Really? Did you begin teaching when you were ten?”

She clenched her jaw. Was there no end to the man’s rudeness? “No sir. I was eighteen. And if you’ll excuse me, I must go, or I’ll be late for my appointment.” She turned and strode away.

“There’s no need to rush off in a huff.” He caught up with her. “I didn’t mean to insult you.”

“I’m not insulted, just intent on being punctual.” She cast him a quick

side glance. "I don't have the time or luxury to stand by the roadside and fiddle with car engines."

He grinned and then chuckled.

Heat flashed into her face. Infuriating man! How dare he laugh at her. She hurried on, not giving him the satisfaction of a reply.

"Well, pardon me."

She sent him a withering look and walked on so quickly she got a stitch in her side.

With his long legs, he had no trouble keeping pace. "You certainly have spirit. I like that."

She gulped in a big breath and spun toward him. "You, sir, are entirely too familiar and too rude for words!"

His jaw dropped, and he stared at her, wide-eyed.

With her face burning, she marched away. She'd only gone a few steps before regret overtook her. *Forgive me, Lord. I should not have spoken to him like that. But he was so ill mannered I couldn't help myself.* She sighed and lifted her eyes to heaven. *I'm sorry. I know that's not true. You're faithful to give me the strength to control my tongue if I will only ask. But please, Lord, could You make him forget what I said? Or at least let me have little contact with him at Highland?*

She doubted that last part of her prayer would be answered. While Highland Hall was a large house, the staff probably saw each other throughout the day.

What a terrible way to start off. No doubt he'd tell everyone she was hot-tempered and not worthy of the position of governess. And that was assuming she got the job. And she must. Her father's illness had stretched on for months, forcing them to leave India and return to England. Now that he was unable to practice medicine, her parents depended on her for support. She must not let them down, no matter how humbling or difficult the job might be.

The lane curved to the right, and Highland Hall came into view. Julia's steps slowed as she took in the lovely grounds and large house. It looked

more like a castle, standing four stories high at its tallest point, with a wide lawn and curved, gravel drive leading to the front door. It was built of sand-colored stone, and though some sections had turned yellow and gray with age, it still looked sturdy and imposing. A tall, round turret stood at the right corner, and an arched portico stretched halfway across the front of the house.

Oh Lord, that house is worth a fortune, and the people who live there are definitely used to a different life than I've lived. How will I ever fit in?

She shook her head, then straightened her shoulders. There was no time to fret, not if she wanted to make a good impression and arrive at the appointed hour. She made her way around the side of the house, following the directions Reverend Langford had given her.

A broad-shouldered man wearing a brown cap and tweed coat pushed a wheelbarrow toward the greenhouse. He stopped and nodded to her. "Can I help you, miss?" He looked about thirty-five and had a kind, honest face.

She returned his nod with a slight smile. "I have an appointment with Mrs. Emmitt."

He pointed to a door tucked in a corner at the back of the house. "Just ring the bell there, miss, and someone will be along to help you."

She thanked him and crossed the rear courtyard. Pulling in a deep breath, she smoothed her hand down her cloak and skirt and checked her hat. Everything seemed to be in place. Lifting her hand, she pressed the bell while her stomach fluttered like a nervous bird.

Only a few seconds passed before the door opened and a plump young woman with rosy cheeks and bright blue eyes greeted her. She wore a white apron over her dark green servant's uniform and a white cap. "How can I help you, miss?"

"I'm Julia Foster. I'm here to see Mrs. Emmitt."

"Very good. Come this way." She started down the steps and smiled over her shoulder. "I'm Lydia, one of the housemaids. Are you here about a position?"

"Yes." Remembering her encounter with the brooding chauffeur, she decided not to add any more details. As they reached the bottom step, the

heavenly scent of baking bread and roasting meat floated toward her. She breathed deeply, savoring the smell. Her empty stomach contracted, reminding her that she had walked off the simple breakfast of porridge she'd eaten at seven.

Lydia led the way past the kitchen. Julia glanced through the doorway and saw two young women and a man in a white chef's jacket chopping vegetables at the table in the center of the room. He said something to one of the women, but his French accent was so strong Julia couldn't understand him.

"You'll want to mind your p's and q's with Mrs. Emmitt," Lydia said, continuing down the hallway. "She's a stickler for proper manners and such. But you're smart-looking. That should help it go well for you."

"Thank you," Julia murmured, though she wasn't sure that was the right response.

"This is it." Lydia stopped in front of a closed door. "Mug's parlor, at least that's what we call it." She grinned and nodded. "Go on, then. Give it a knock, and good luck to you."

"Thank you." Julia sent off one more silent prayer, then rapped on the door while the maid disappeared into another room.

The door swung open, and a stern-faced woman who appeared to be about sixty looked out at her. She wore a plain navy-blue dress with a cameo pinned at the high neck and a set of keys clipped to her waistband. Small, wire-rimmed glasses perched on the bridge of her nose.

"Good day, ma'am. I'm Julia Foster."

"Come in. I've been expecting you." She motioned toward the straight-backed chair by the fireplace while she lowered herself onto the settee. "Do you have your letters of reference?"

"Yes ma'am." Julia took the letters from Reverend Langford and Lady Farnsworth from her handbag and gave them to Mrs. Emmitt.

The housekeeper pursed her lips and read Lady Farnsworth's letter first. "She says your family has been acquainted with hers for many years."

"Yes, my father served as her family physician since the time of her marriage to Lord Farnsworth."

“I’m not sure what that has to do with you.” Mrs. Emmitt opened and read Reverend Langford’s letter next, her stern expression never softening. “It says you’ve been out of the country for twelve years. Is that correct?”

Julia nodded. “Our family has been serving in India since 1899 with the London Missionary Society.”

Mrs. Emmitt’s nose wrinkled slightly as her gaze dipped back to the letter. “You were a teacher there?”

“Yes, we opened a home for girls and ran a medical clinic for the village.”

Memories of India came flooding back—the overflowing marketplace, heavy with the scent of spices, the magenta flowers climbing the stone wall surrounding their home, the colorful embroidered saris of the women, and the beautiful dark faces of their girls...her students and the flowers of their ministry.

“Miss Foster?”

Julia blinked. “I’m sorry, what did you say?”

“How do you intend to teach the social skills our young ladies need to learn to enter society when you’ve been raised in”—she looked at Julia over the top of her glasses—“such a heathen environment?”

Heat infused her cheeks. “I was raised in Fulton by loving Christian parents who passed on their godly values and manners. I attended the village school until age twelve, then my mother taught me at home until I was fifteen. My training continued under my parents’ guidance when we traveled to India. My experiences there have given me unique opportunities to see God at work in the world and to interact with all types of people.”

Mrs. Emmitt took a handkerchief from her sleeve and dabbed her nose. “Yes...all types of people.” She folded the letters and handed them back to Julia. “We’ve had a difficult time finding a governess. There are few qualified candidates in the area.”

Julia wasn’t sure what to say to that remark, so she kept silent.

Mrs. Emmitt sighed and gave a resigned nod. “Sir William has two children. His son, Andrew, is nine, and his daughter, Millicent, is six. An-

drew will most likely be going away to school within the year, but he needs someone to help him prepare. Millicent has poor health. She needs careful attention and should not overexert herself.”

Julia nodded, her hopes rising. Did this mean Mrs. Emmitt was satisfied with her qualifications?

“The children’s mother passed away three years ago, which may be the reason Andrew has had such a difficult time.”

Julia tensed. A difficult time? What did she mean?

“Sir William is also the guardian of his two young cousins,” Mrs. Emmitt continued. “Miss Katherine Ramsey turns eighteen next month, and Miss Penelope is fifteen. The girls have been raised here at Highland, and it’s been quite an adjustment for them to grieve their father’s death and see the estate passed to their second cousin once removed.” Mrs. Emmitt sent her a pained look. “It has been an adjustment for us all.”

Julia swallowed, trying to take it all in. “So I would be teaching Sir William’s children as well as the two young ladies?” Reverend Langford hadn’t mentioned Katherine and Penelope. No wonder Mrs. Emmitt wanted to know if Julia was prepared to teach social skills. Katherine was old enough to be presented at court and take part in the London social season.

“That’s correct.” Mrs. Emmitt nodded. “You would oversee all four, following a program for their education and training set out by Sir William.”

Julia had never taken part in the season, but her mother had, and she could probably advise her on how to help Katherine prepare.

“If that’s agreeable to you, I will take you to meet Sir William, and he can finish the interview.” Mrs. Emmitt stood and waited for Julia’s reply.

“Yes ma’am, I would be happy to meet him.” Julia rose.

“Come along then.” Mrs. Emmitt left the parlor and led the way up the stone staircase, past the green baize door, and into the great hall.

Julia’s eyes widened as she gazed up at the beautiful carved ceiling that arched high overhead. Richly colored tapestries and paintings of distinguished people hung on the paneled walls. Were they the past owners of Highland? A large fireplace with an elaborate marble mantle stood in the

center of the wall on her right, and opposite that, a grand oak staircase rose to an open gallery one floor above.

Mrs. Emmitt glanced over her shoulder. "Don't dawdle."

Julia dropped her gaze and hurried after the housekeeper. There would be time to take in the splendor of the house after she spoke to Sir William—if she got the job. A shiver of anticipation raced down her arms.

A stout butler in a neatly pressed black suit, white shirt, and black tie stepped forward to meet them. A touch of silver in his dark hair gave him a distinguished appearance. His excellent posture and calm expression announced he was a man of dignity and authority.

"Mr. Lawrence, this is Miss Foster. I am interviewing her for the position of governess. Is Sir William available to meet with her?"

Mr. Lawrence looked Julia over and gave a curt nod. "I'll see." He stepped through a nearby doorway, and she heard him say, "Miss Foster, the woman applying for the position of governess, is here to see you, sir."

"Who? Oh yes. Have her come in." Sir William's voice seemed to carry a note of irritation.

Mr. Lawrence stepped out the door and nodded to them. Julia took a deep breath and followed Mrs. Emmitt into the room. Bookshelves lined the wall on the right, and opposite the door, three tall windows looked out on the side gardens. In the corner a man sat at a beautifully carved desk with his back to them. He put his pen aside and turned to face them.

A shock wave jolted Julia. Her eyes widened as she stared at the man she'd met on the lane, the man she supposed was the chauffeur. Her stomach tumbled to her feet, and her hopes fell with it.

"Miss Foster, please take a seat." Sir William stood and nodded toward an overstuffed chair. His gaze shifted to the housekeeper. "That will be all, Mrs. Emmitt."

The housekeeper stiffened. "Perhaps I should stay and—"

"That won't be necessary." His steady gaze made his meaning clear.

Mrs. Emmitt gave a curt nod, then turned and left the room. The butler followed.

Julia swallowed and sank into the chair.

“So, Miss Foster, you’ve come seeking the position of governess for my children and my two cousins?”

“Yes sir.” Julia clasped her hands in her lap, her face burning. “But first, I must apologize for the way I spoke to you earlier this morning on the lane. I’m sorry. I had no idea... I thought you were the...chauffeur.”

“There is no need to apologize. I should have introduced myself.”

“Yes sir, that would have been helpful.” *And it might’ve kept me from making a fool of myself and jeopardizing my chances at Highland.*

He sat opposite her. “So tell me why you believe you’re qualified for the position of governess.”

Was he truly going to give her a chance, even after the way she’d spoken to him? She gathered her thoughts and looked into his eyes. “Since I was fifteen I’ve assisted my parents, teaching and training the young girls who came into our care in our mission work in India.”

“India, you say?”

“Yes sir. Our family served there for the last twelve years. My father is a physician, and we ran a medical clinic and a home for girls who were orphans or those we were able to buy out of...difficult situations.”

He frowned slightly. “What kind of situations?”

She hesitated, trying to remember exactly how her parents explained it. “It’s hard to speak of, sir, but some girls are sold by their families to serve in Hindu temples.” She looked down, her cheeks warming again. “It’s a very heathen practice that takes away a young girl’s innocence and purity.”

His expression sobered. “Rescuing girls caught in such circumstances is commendable. What was your role there?”

“The girls lived with us at the mission station. I helped oversee their care, education, and upbringing. I also assisted my father in the clinic and helped my mother with all the practical aspects of running our home and the mission.”

“That sounds like quite an undertaking.”

“It’s important work, sir. I felt privileged to do it.”

“You seem quite committed.” He hesitated a moment. “May I ask why you decided to leave?”

“My father’s health has been declining for quite some time. It reached a crisis three months ago. He needed more medical care, so we decided to come back to England.”

“Has he improved since you returned?”

“Not as much as we had hoped. He is confined to his bed most days.” She looked away and tried to swallow past the tightness in her throat.

His expression softened. “I’m sorry to hear that. Perhaps with more rest and good care he will recover.”

“That is our hope and prayer.” She pressed her lips together for a moment, and then lifted her gaze to meet his. “And that’s why it’s so important that I find a position nearby, one that allows me to help support my parents and makes it possible for me to visit them on my afternoons off.”

“I see.” He stood and walked over to the desk. “Give me a moment, please.”

Her heart pounded, and she clutched the folds of her skirt. Had she said too much? She closed her eyes.

Please Lord, move his heart. Give me a chance to help my parents and serve this family.



William shuffled through the papers on his desk, turning the decision over in his mind. Miss Foster had experience as a teacher, but she had worked under her parents’ guidance in India. Could she handle these new responsibilities on her own? She was obviously much younger than past governesses, but none of them had lasted more than six months. Perhaps age was not the most important factor to consider. He’d had a devil of a time finding someone suitable in London, and it had been even more challenging since he’d come to Highland.

He also had to think of his young cousins. They needed someone who could help them complete their education and guide them in finding suitable husbands so they could take their place in society. Was Miss Foster up to the task?

He tapped his fingers on the desk. It was hard to discern a person’s

character by her appearance, but Miss Foster made a good impression. Her clothing was simple, neat, and modest. She was slender but seemed healthy, with a fair complexion and a rosy tint to her cheeks.

But was she trustworthy? That was the most important question. There didn't seem to be any guile in her blue eyes, but he had been fooled before, and with very painful results.

He clamped his jaw and banished those thoughts. Turning from his desk, he faced Miss Foster. "Thank you for waiting."

She opened her eyes and looked up at him, her expression hopeful. Had she been praying? He supposed that might be her habit, coming from a religious family. Well, a little piety might be good for his cousins.

"I've decided to offer you the position."

Relief flashed in her eyes. "Thank you, sir."

"But it will be on a trial basis. One month seems like an adequate time to judge if this is the right decision."

"A month, sir?"

"Yes. I want to be sure you can carry out your duties and handle the children and my cousins. Are you agreeable to that?"

She glanced away for a moment and then looked back at him. "Yes sir. I'm willing to accept the position on a trial basis."

"Good. Mrs. Emmitt will inform you about the children's needs and routines."

Lawrence walked into the room. "Mr. Bixby is here to see you, sir."

Sir William nodded. "Have him wait. We're almost finished here."

"Yes sir." Lawrence hesitated, and a pained expression crossed his face. "I'm sorry, sir, but I thought you should know Master Andrew has taken a fall."

William's heart lurched. "Is he hurt?"

"Just a small bump on the head. Mrs. Emmitt had him lie down, and she put some ice on it."

"How did it happen?"

"He pulled a chair over and was climbing up to open a cabinet in the pantry. It appears he was trying to help himself to another piece of cake."

“Blast! Where was the nursery maid? Isn’t it her job to keep an eye on him?”

“Yes sir. It is.”

“Well, she is failing miserably. This is the third time this week she’s let him get into mischief. Tell Mrs. Emmitt I am not pleased. She’s to speak to her and be sure it doesn’t happen again. Andrew is to be sent to his room, and he’s not to have anything to eat until dinner.”

“Yes sir.” The butler turned and left the room.

“Excuse me, sir, but will you speak to Master Andrew about the incident?”

William frowned at Miss Foster. “I hadn’t planned on it. And why should I? Don’t you think that punishment is sufficient?”

“Perhaps, but how can a child learn from your discipline unless you discuss the offense and explain what is expected of him?”

“That, Miss Foster, is why I’m hiring a governess. It will be your duty to supervise and train the children.”

“But isn’t it a parent’s responsibility to bring up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?” She rose from her chair. “How can you carry out that duty when your message is relayed through a butler or even a governess?”

He inhaled slowly. Did this slip of a girl really think it was her responsibility to instruct him in his role as parent? “I have always worked through my staff to care for my children, and I plan to continue to do so. If you want to fill this position, you need to put aside your modern child-rearing philosophies and accept my traditional methods.”

“My philosophies are not modern, quite the contrary. They’re biblical. And—”

He raised his hand. “Miss Foster, do you intend to argue with me before you’ve even begun your first day of employment?”

Her eyes widened, then she dropped her gaze. “No sir. I’m sorry. I spoke out of turn.”

“Yes, you did.” He straightened his jacket, regretting his tone. He hadn’t

meant to sound so harsh. “However, I’m willing to overlook it. Will you be able to start tomorrow?”

She looked up. “Yes sir.”

“Report to Mrs. Emmitt at eight in the morning. You may go.”



Julia walked out of the library and into the great hall, her heart beating hard and fast. Mr. Lawrence stood by the door, a disapproving frown on his face. He’d obviously heard everything she’d said. One more mark against her. A rotund gentleman in a black suit waited with him. He brushed his finger across his thick silver moustache and shifted his black leather case to the other hand. Mr. Lawrence showed the man in and announced him to Sir William.

She slowly crossed the great hall, taking time to look at the portraits and beautiful furnishings. Was this the type of home her grandparents owned? Had her mother grown up surrounded by wealth like this until she had decided to marry against her parents’ wishes? That decision had caused a huge uproar, and Julia’s grandfather had cut her parents off completely.

But her parents’ love and shared faith had carried them through those difficult times. After Julia’s family traveled to India, her mother’s sister, Beatrice, shared their letters with Julia’s grandmother, but they were always kept secret from Julia’s grandfather who had never forgiven his daughter for marrying a young, middle-class doctor. Julia had never met her grandparents, or anyone else on her mother’s side of the family, and she doubted she ever would. Her domineering grandfather had forbidden it, and no one in the family dared to go against his wishes...except her parents.

She approached a beautiful marble sculpture on a pedestal. The peaceful expression on the woman’s face drew Julia closer. Who could she be? Leaning toward the statue, she peered at the inscription on the small brass nameplate.

“Miss Foster!”

She jumped at the butler’s sharp tone and stifled a gasp. “Yes sir?”

“The staff do not use the front entrance unless they are greeting guests or accompanying the family out of doors.”

Julia’s gaze swung toward the front door. “Oh yes, of course.”

“The staff exit downstairs, through the kitchen or at the end of the lower hall.”

She nodded. “Yes, I came in that way.”

“And that is where you will exit.” He nodded toward the other end of the great hall. “Mrs. Emmitt asked that you see her on your way out.”

“I’ll look for her downstairs. Thank you.” She walked at a comfortable pace through the great hall, taking in a few more glimpses of the paintings and crests carved into the molding above the fireplace. Such splendor! What would it be like to be surrounded by such beauty every day? Certainly much different from her simple life at the mission station in India or her parents’ rented cottage in Fulton.

As she reached the end of the hall, she turned and looked back over her shoulder. Highland Hall was a large and impressive home, but wealth and prestige didn’t always bring happiness. She didn’t have to look any further than Sir William Ramsey to see that was true.



“I’m sorry I don’t have better news for you.” Mr. Bixby, William’s solicitor, shifted in his chair. His moustache twitched, and he grinned slightly. “I’m afraid these death duties will be the death of us all.”

William turned his brooding gaze on the solicitor. “I don’t see the humor in it.”

The little man immediately sobered. “Forgive me, I was hoping to offer a little levity.”

William grimaced. “It’s all right. It’s not your fault the government is trying to choke the aristocracy out of existence.”

The solicitor bobbed his head. “Exactly. It’s dreadful. These inheritance laws have made it almost impossible for families to pass on their estates intact. Perhaps Parliament will repeal them.”

“I doubt it. The government will become dependent on the funds, and there will be no turning back.”

Bixby clicked his tongue. “I suppose so, but not everyone can comply. Some families have had to sell their estates and settle in town.”

William scowled and walked toward the window. He’d come here to escape London. All the gossip and social wrangling was enough to turn a man’s stomach. Selling the house in London seemed preferable to auctioning off a chunk of his newly inherited estate. But when they had prepared to move to Highland, his sister Sarah pleaded with him to keep the family home in London so they could return a few times each year. He hated the idea of disappointing her. With her crippled hand and arm, happy childhood memories were one of Sarah’s few comforts.

“Perhaps the funds from the sale of your business interests in London could cover the duties?”

“I’ve set those aside for the repairs that need to be made here at Highland. We can’t let the house fall down around us.” William returned to his chair opposite Mr. Bixby. “My late cousin, Randolph Ramsey, was not the best manager of his finances or property.”

“I see.” Mr. Bixby stroked his chin. “Then you’ll have to come up with the funds another way.”

“How long do we have before the payment must be made?”

“I can slow things down a bit, but I’d say the first of March at the latest.”

Four and a half months? What did the government expect him to do? Wave a magic wand and double his bank account?

“Perhaps the estate can bring in more income. There is the rent you receive from your tenant farmers, and you have a fine herd of sheep, large orchards, and acres of grain.”

“I’ve only been here three weeks. I’ve just begun to get my feet under me. I have no idea if we’re maximizing our income.”

“Well, I’m afraid you’ll have to do something. They’ll tack on a very steep fine if you don’t pay on time.”

William growled under his breath. “All right. I’ll meet with my overseer and see if we can increase our income over the next few months.”

Mr. Bixby stood. “Very good. I think that’s your best option.”

William rose from his chair and pulled the cord to summon Lawrence. When the butler appeared, William shook hands with Mr. Bixby and bid him good day. The butler showed the solicitor out.

William returned to his desk, where a stack of repair estimates, bills, and letters needed his attention, but he struggled to regain his focus. He had no idea overseeing a large estate would be this difficult. It made his former position in London—running his family’s import business—seem like a holiday.

When he first heard he had inherited Highland Hall and his late cousin’s title as baronet, he had been thrilled with the prospect of leaving London and settling in the country as master of his own estate. Had he made a mistake? Perhaps he should not have been so quick to sell his business interests to his younger brother, David.

Well, it was too late to change course now. He must find a way to restore Highland to its former glory, even if it drained his bank account. Perhaps then he would be respected as master of a fine estate rather than pitied for—

He clenched his jaw and banished those thoughts.

Turning, he looked up at the large painting of Randolph Ramsey, the former master of Highland, hanging above the library fireplace. Why had his cousin ignored the needed repairs on the house and property? He’d never confided in William about his financial struggles. Was it the strain of running the estate that had driven his cousin to an early grave?

Or was it something else?



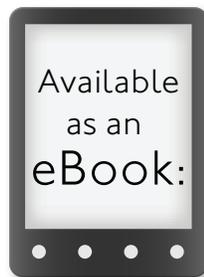
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