

CARRIE TURANSKY



SHINE
like the
DAWN

a novel

Praise for
Shine Like the Dawn

“*Shine Like the Dawn* is a shining gem of a story. Turansky creates characters that are vibrant along with a sweet romance that elicits a satisfying sigh. Intrigue, secrets, and dangerous conflicts make the plot riveting until the very end.”

—JODY HEDLUND, author of *Luther and Katharina*,
ECPA Book of the Year

“Reading a Carrie Turansky novel is the next best thing to taking a trip to England, with the added luxury of stepping back in time. *Shine Like the Dawn* is an Edwardian gem, layering rich spiritual truths with love, loss, secrets, and forgiveness, always showcasing God’s abundant restoration. This hope-infused story is as lovely as the cover!”

—LAURA FRANTZ, author of *A Moonbow Night*

“From the first compelling page to the last heart-lifting moment, *Shine Like the Dawn* drew me in, made me smile then cry—all while keeping me on the edge of my seat. Turansky’s latest English historical romance, rich in mystery and intrigue, brings to life warm and memorable characters nestled between a charming Edwardian village and its local grand estate. Uplifting and highly recommended.”

—CATHY GOHLKE, Christy-award winning author
of *Secrets She Kept* and *Saving Amelie*

“With her trademark heart and attention to historical detail, Carrie Turansky paints a picture of loss, inner torment, and—ultimately—healing. Set against a backdrop of Edwardian England, *Shine Like the Dawn* is aptly named because it shows the illumination that floods the soul when forgiveness replaces bitterness and a hurting heart finds its way back to the Maker of Light. A moving, life-impacting, engrossing story.”

—KIM VOGEL SAWYER, best-selling author of *Guide Me Home*

“Enter a world of innovations, mysterious manor houses, sweet romances, and whispers of suspense, all wrapped within a novel that gives off Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South* vibes. In typical sweeping style, Carrie Turansky takes us on a journey to another time and place with added intrigue to keep us wondering to the very end—a story worth adding to your reading list.”

—PEPPER D. BASHAM, award-winning author
of the Penned in Time series and *A Twist of Faith*

“In this charming novel—filled with mystery, surprise, romance, and courage—Carrie Turansky skillfully transports us to Edwardian England. Readers will root for our heroine as she faces the shocking loss which dominates her life and reaches toward a future filled with faith, hope, and perhaps . . . love. Captivating.”

—SANDRA BYRD, author of *A Lady in Disguise*

“With a vivid setting in beautiful but tumultuous Edwardian England, Carrie Turansky masterfully tells a tale of family, love, trust, and betrayal. A charming story for every lover of historical romance!”

—ROSEANNA M. WHITE, best-selling author
of the Ladies of the Manor series

“Lovers of English drama set during any era will certainly enjoy Carrie Turansky’s latest novel! With a mix of themes from both *Downton Abbey* and *North and South*, *Shine Like the Dawn* will intrigue and enthrall readers until the very last page!”

—DAWN CRANDALL, award-winning author
of *The Hesitant Heiress* and *The Cautious Maiden*

SHINE
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DAWN

BOOKS BY CARRIE TURANSKY

NOVELS

A Refuge at Highland Hall
The Daughter of Highland Hall
The Governess of Highland Hall
Snowflake Sweethearts
A Man to Trust
Seeking His Love
Along Came Love
Surrendered Hearts

NOVELLAS

Moonlight Over Manhattan
Mountain Christmas Brides
Where Two Hearts Meet
Christmas Mail-Order Brides
Kiss the Bride
A Blue and Gray Christmas
A Big Apple Christmas
Wedded Bliss?

SHINE
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DAWN

a novel

CARRIE TURANSKY



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SHINE LIKE THE DAWN

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*This book is dedicated to my heart-sister, Judy Conroy,
for her faithful friendship, powerful prayers,
and endless encouragement.*

Commit your way to the LORD;
trust in him and he will do this:
He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn,
your vindication like the noonday sun.

PSALM 37:5-6



PROLOGUE

August 22, 1899

Sunlight blinked off the rippling surface of Tumbledon Lake and into Margaret Lounsbury's eyes. She squinted and adjusted the brim of her straw hat to shade her view, then took hold of the oar on her side of the sixteen-foot rowboat.

"Are you ready?" Her father, Daniel Lounsbury, dipped his oar into the water and looked across at Maggie. Pleasant lines fanned out from the corners of his dark-brown eyes. A reddish-brown beard covered the lower half of his tanned face, but it couldn't hide his smile.

"Yes!" She returned his smile and lowered her oar for the first stroke.

"The sun's bright today, especially out on the water." Her father looked across the lake to the rocky shore and lush woodlands beyond. Five years earlier, he and his team had dammed a section of the Debdon Burn, filling the small valley with water and creating this beautiful lake in the northernmost section of the estate. It was just one of his many accomplishments as lead landscape architect for Sir William Harcourt of Morningside Manor.

"Do you have a special spot in mind for our picnic?" Maggie's mother, Abigail Lounsbury, sat in the rear of the boat with Maggie's younger sister, Violet, on her lap.

"I found a lovely little glen surrounded by birch trees." Father turned and grinned at Maggie's older sister, Olivia, seated up front. "It will be the perfect place to celebrate your birthday. It looks like a fairy forest."

Olivia's eyes sparkled. "I can't wait to see it."

Maggie's heart lifted, and she pulled her oar through the water, matching her father's strong strokes. With the warm sunshine on her shoulders and her family around her, she couldn't imagine a happier day.

The breeze picked up and blew a strand of Maggie's hair across her cheek.

"It looks like rain is coming our way." Her mother nodded to the west, a slight crease in her brow. She adjusted her hold on Violet.

Heavy, gray clouds rose above the trees beyond the shoreline, though the rest of the sky remained mostly clear.

Father lifted his gaze and studied the clouds for a few seconds. "I'm sure we've no cause for concern." His confident tone eased Maggie's mind. There was no one who knew more about plants, animals, and the weather than her father. If he didn't believe a storm would threaten their afternoon picnic, there was no need to worry.

A graceful white egret rose out of the grass on the far side of the lake and flew across the water toward them. Violet squirmed on her mother's lap with a gleeful shriek. She looked as though she would climb over the side of the boat any moment if Mother didn't keep a tight hold on her.

Father chuckled. "It seems Violet would like to go swimming."

Olivia turned toward them. "There's not much Violet doesn't like, except perhaps cooked carrots and going down for a nap."

Maggie smiled. Olivia was right about that. Violet had started resisting her naps a few months after she celebrated her first birthday, and she'd never been fond of carrots.

"No swimming today," her mother replied in a serious tone, but Maggie could see the glow of good humor in her eyes.

"Keep up, Maggie," Father called, stroking his oar through the deep water.

She focused on rowing again and picked up her pace to match Father's. As they reached the center of the lake, Maggie heard an odd sloshing sound and looked down. Water slapped against the side of her shoe. She pulled in a sharp breath and lifted her foot. "Father, look!"

He followed her gaze, and his eyes flashed wide. He jerked his oar from the water and scanned the hull of the boat.

Mother straightened. "What is it, Daniel?"

"We seem to have sprung a leak." His voice remained calm, but the muscles in his jaw grew taut.

"What?" Olivia shot a startled glance at Maggie.

Mother wrapped her arms more tightly around Violet. “How large a leak?”

“I don’t know.” Father frowned as he continued to search the floor of the boat, then he grabbed his dripping oar again. “Come on, Maggie, we’ve got to get back to shore.”

Maggie’s hand trembled as she reached for her oar.

Olivia rose, rocking the boat side to side. “Aren’t we closer to the other shore?”

“Olivia, sit down!” Father’s sharp tone startled them all. Olivia sank onto the bench, and Father plunged his oar into the water.

Maggie’s heartbeat pounded in her ears as she strained to keep up with Father’s rapid pace. But even if she could match his deep, steady strokes, would they make it back to the dock before water filled their boat?

What if they couldn’t?

She was a strong swimmer. Father had taught her that skill when she was only seven. She could make it. But Mother and Olivia had never wanted to learn how to swim, and Violet was too young.

Maggie clenched her jaw and pulled the oar through the water, her arms burning from the strain, but their swift pace across the lake only seemed to bring more water into the boat. It splashed around Maggie’s ankles and the hem of her dark blue skirt.

“Daniel, it’s too far! We’ll never make it!” Mother’s frantic voice sent tremors racing down Maggie’s legs.

“Pull, Maggie!” Father grunted and heaved his oar around again.

Maggie gripped her oar and darted a glance toward the shore. Panic climbed up her throat, stealing her breath. They were only halfway there. Mother was right. Water sloshed up Maggie’s leg and soaked her skirt. Soon lake water would pour over the side and the boat would go down.

“Father!” Olivia scooted forward as far as she could, but there was no escaping the rising water lapping at her legs.

Violet grabbed her mother’s neck and broke into pitiful cries.

Father’s gaze darted from one family member to the next. “We’ll have to swim. Maggie, you take Violet. I’ll help your mother and Olivia.”

Fear froze Maggie. She blinked and tried to focus on the distant shore. It

was at least half a mile, maybe more. If Violet would calm down, she might be able to swim with her sister, but how could Father help Mother and Olivia?

Father pulled Violet from Mother's arms.

"No, Daniel!" Mother reached for her youngest daughter. Her face had gone pale, and her eyes shimmered with tears.

"Be calm, Abigail. Maggie will take care of Violet." He passed Violet to Maggie.

Her hands shook as she grabbed her squirming sister, but she held on tight.

"We're counting on you, Maggie." Love and fierce determination radiated from his eyes. "Safeguard your sister. Don't turn back for any reason."

Maggie swallowed hard. "Yes, Father." She blinked her burning eyes, wanting to say she loved him and she would do her best, but there was no time.

"Go on now." He helped her over the side of the boat and into the cold water.

Kicking to stay afloat, she rolled over onto her back and pulled Violet onto her chest. Slipping her arms under Violet's, she pushed off from the side of the boat.

The shock of the cold water and the weight of her skirt and blouse pulled her down, but she thrust herself through the water, holding tight to Violet and kicking as hard as she could.

Oh God, have mercy on us! Save my family!

Tears and lake water flooded her eyes, blocking her view of her family and the boat. Water rushed past her ears, but it couldn't block out her mother's fearful cries, her father's shouts, or her sister's heartrending calls for help. But she pushed on, her promise to her father giving her strength.

Violet whimpered and tossed her head from side to side, then she lay back on Maggie's chest, stunned by the cold water and frightening events.

Maggie swam on, listening for her father's confident call or his strokes in the water behind her. But all she heard was her own heavy breathing and the splashing water as she kicked her way closer to shore.

Finally, her feet touched the muddy bottom, and she dragged herself and Violet out of the water. Her legs trembled and water poured from her clothes,

pulling her down. But she forced herself to stay standing. Turning, she wiped her face and scanned the water.

Nothing broke the rippling surface of the lake. No boat. Not one member of her beloved family. Numb with dread, she blinked and stared across the quiet lake.

Where were they? How could they all just disappear?

Violet cried and clung to Maggie's leg through her soggy skirt. A gust of wind sent a cold shiver through Maggie, and her teeth chattered hard.

Clouds scuttled across the sky, blocking the sun and casting a gray shadow over the scene. Heavy raindrops splattered on the ground, and then the heavens opened and rain poured down on her head and shoulders. Still, Maggie stood, staring across the lake.

Her father had been wrong. A storm had come. A more terrible storm than she could've ever imagined.

Maggie searched the lake once more, straining to hear the voices of those she loved, but the only sound was the cry of the egret as it rose from the water's edge and flew across the lake toward the eastern shore.

She sank down on the muddy shore and pulled Violet into her arms while rainwater and tears ran down their faces.



Four Years Later

April 1903

Maggie turned the hat block and examined the broad-brimmed, yellow straw hat. Red silk roses circled the crown, with little blue cornflowers sprinkled in between. It looked perfect. She could imagine wearing it to a garden party or afternoon tea in London.

She released a soft sigh and sat back on her stool. Not that she would be going to London to attend events like those any time soon or wearing this lovely hat.

“I like the color combination and the choice of flowers, but you’ll need to add several ostrich feathers if you want to please Mrs. Huntington.” Grandmother Hayes looked across at Maggie from behind the long glass display case on the opposite side of the millinery shop. Her silver-rimmed spectacles rested halfway down her nose, and her rosy cheeks creased as she sent Maggie a knowing smile.

Maggie clicked her tongue and looked back at the hat. “I suppose you’re right.” She didn’t like flamboyant designs with piles of feathers and gobs of ribbons, but that seemed to be what most women wanted, especially those on their way to London for the season.

Maggie took two yellow ostrich feathers from the box on the shelf, then reached for her needle and thread. Grandmother had owned this shop for almost twenty-five years, ever since she’d become a widow and needed to provide for herself. She knew everything there was to know about pleasing her customers, and she’d taught Maggie how to fashion the most stylish hats in Northumberland.

But arthritis had stiffened Grandmother's hands in the last few years, and now Maggie did most of the intricate work. Grandmother still made a few hats, oversaw the shop, and guided Maggie with design suggestions.

Maggie smiled, tenderness for her grandmother warming her heart. What would she and Violet have done without Grandmother Hayes? She had taken them in when no other relative could be bothered.

"Can we have buns with our tea today?" Maggie's six-year-old sister rested her chin in her hand and sent Maggie an imploring puppy-dog look. She sat on a stool behind the opposite counter, next to Grandmother.

Maggie pressed her lips together and looked down at the hat in her hands. Violet was a dear, but she had a sweet tooth that never seemed to be satisfied.

Her little sister clasped her hands below her chin. "Please, Maggie. I love buns, and we haven't had any in such a long time." Just last week they'd bought buns from Mrs. Fenwick's Teashop. But to a six-year-old she supposed a week qualified as a long time. "You said you would think about it." Violet smiled and batted her long, dark eyelashes at Maggie.

Maggie stifled a groan. She hated to say no to her sister, but if they spent those shillings on tea treats, it would mean cutting back somewhere else.

When Maggie didn't answer, Violet's face brightened. "You wouldn't have to stop working. I could get them. I'm old enough."

The teashop was directly across the street. Violet loved to be trusted with the coins and allowed to make the purchase and bring back the buns in a paper sack.

"Please, Maggie." Violet's plaintive voice pulled at Maggie's heart.

There were so many times she had to say no. Perhaps she could find some way to stretch the budget just a bit more. "All right. I suppose we can buy some buns today. Bring me the canister."

Violet hopped off her stool, grinning like she'd won the grand prize in a footrace, and hurried past the curtain that separated the front room of the shop from their tiny private sitting room and kitchen in the back. The only other rooms in the building were a small bedroom upstairs that Maggie shared with Violet and another small bedroom behind the kitchen for Grandmother.

The bell over the front door jingled. Maggie looked up as Mrs. Eugenia Huntington and her eighteen-year-old daughter, Elyse, walked in. Both women were dressed in stylish walking suits and wore large, elaborate hats.

Grandmother stood. "Good afternoon, Mrs. Huntington, Miss Elyse."

Mrs. Huntington returned the greeting, and Elyse nodded to Grandmother and Maggie. Elyse was preparing for her first season in London. Maggie had heard through one of her friends that Mrs. Huntington had ordered enough evening gowns and day dresses for Elyse to fill several trunks. And then, of course, there were all the hats, gloves, parasols, and shoes to go with them.

A pang shot through Maggie's heart. She would have traveled south, more than three hundred miles, to London and taken part in the season if her parents were still living. She might even have received a marriage proposal by now. Her late father had been a well-respected landscape architect and acquainted with many fine families in London and all around the country.

But the deaths of her parents and sister had changed everything.

The only future she could imagine now was one tied to the millinery shop, where she would spend her days designing hats she would never wear to help provide for her grandmother and sister.

Grandmother came around the end of the counter. "Maggie is just finishing one of the hats for Miss Elyse, but I believe the others you ordered are ready."

"Yes, these two are finished." Maggie reached up and took a wide-brimmed lavender hat from the shelf and placed it on the glass countertop. Then she reached for a cream-colored hat with pink roses circling the crown and set it next to the other.

"Oh, they're lovely." Elyse beamed as she crossed the shop toward Maggie.

Mrs. Huntington followed, but her brow creased as she regarded the hats. "I'm afraid they're both too plain." She nodded toward the lavender hat. "This one needs more flowers and ribbons, perhaps even some netting and lace."

Elyse turned to Mrs. Huntington. "But Mother, I think—"

The older woman lifted her finger and silenced her daughter. "Your hats must be unique and draw attention so you will stand out from the crowd."

Maggie clamped her lips together, struggling to hold back her reply. Adding more adornments would draw attention, but it would make the hat look overdone and gaudy. Perhaps she could convince Mrs. Huntington to change her mind once she saw how lovely the hat looked on Elyse. “Why don’t we try it on to test the fit?”

Mrs. Huntington’s frown remained in place, but she gave a slight nod. Her daughter unpinned her hat and stepped forward. Maggie placed the lavender hat on the young woman’s head. They all turned toward the mirror on the countertop and examined Elyse’s reflection.

Grandmother adjusted the angle of the hat, tipping it a bit more to the side. “The color certainly highlights her blue eyes and flatters her skin tone.”

Mrs. Huntington studied the hat. “It definitely needs more flowers and ribbons. And perhaps a trailing vine off the side. We want it to look impressive from every angle.”

Maggie rolled her eyes behind Mrs. Huntington’s back. There was hardly room to add any more flowers, and a trailing vine would look ridiculous. She was just about to say so when Grandmother sent her a warning look.

Maggie stifled a sigh. How many times had her grandmother told her she must listen to the customer’s wishes and find a way to please her?

She reached under the counter for her basket of silk roses. “Perhaps we could add a few more flowers on the side.” She chose three smaller roses and tucked them in with the rest of the bouquet covering the crown of the hat.

Mrs. Huntington surveyed the design with lifted eyebrows. “That’s better, and now the ribbons.”

Maggie reached for a spool of green velvet ribbon. “This color would be a good contrast to the flowers.” She looped a few pieces around the roses and stood back.

“That’s a good choice.” Grandmother reached up and tucked the ribbon in at the back.

Mrs. Huntington sighed. “There’s no time to start over. We leave for London tomorrow morning. I suppose it will have to do.”

Heat flushed Maggie’s cheeks. There was nothing wrong with the hat! It was just as fine as any she would find at the shops in London. Maggie and her

grandmother subscribed to several catalogs to make sure their designs kept pace with the latest fashions.

Grandmother stepped forward, blocking Mrs. Huntington's view of Maggie. "Let's try on the other." She placed the cream-colored hat on Elyse, while Maggie stood back with her arms crossed.

Elyse turned her head from left to right, examining herself in the mirror. "I like the way the brim is lifted on the side, with the flowers placed underneath."

Mrs. Huntington stepped to the left, inspecting the view from that angle. "Perhaps some more netting and feathers would make it look fuller."

Grandmother lifted her silver eyebrows and glanced at Maggie.

Maggie set her jaw and reached for the basket of netting from the shelf behind the counter. She might not agree with Mrs. Huntington, but she couldn't ignore her suggestions.

Grandmother took some cream netting from the basket and wove a piece in with the flowers. "We can gather this over the crown and add a few more feathers to give it a bit more height."

Mrs. Huntington nodded. "Yes. That's what it needs."

Violet had been waiting patiently during the whole exchange, but now she tugged on Maggie's sleeve and held up the canister.

"Excuse me a moment." Maggie turned away from the women, popped the lid off the canister, and took out two coins. Bending down, she whispered in Violet's ear. "Be careful when you cross the street, and wait your turn nicely in the shop."

Violet returned an eager nod. "I will." Then she hurried out the door, setting the bell to jingling.

Maggie watched Violet through the window. Her sister stopped and looked both ways, then dashed across the street and into Fenwick's Teashop. Maggie turned back to their customers.

"Maggie is just about finished with the third hat." Grandmother held out the yellow straw hat with the red roses and little blue cornflowers.

"Oh, that's very pretty." The young woman's eyes sparkled as she gazed at the hat.

Maggie rose up on her toes with a pleased smile. At least Elyse Huntington had good taste and knew a lovely hat when she saw one.

Mrs. Huntington wrinkled her nose. “No, Elyse can’t wear that. It’s much too informal for the London season.”

Maggie pulled in a sharp breath. She might not have been to London recently, but she’d seen photographs and advertisements for hats very similar to this one in magazines published there.

Grandmother pushed her spectacles up her nose and looked back and forth between Mrs. Huntington and her daughter. “Surely Miss Elyse will be attending garden parties or boating events, and this hat would certainly be appropriate for—”

The older woman shook her head and pushed the hat away. “It looks like a hat worn by a shopgirl or the village schoolmarm.”

Fire flashed through Maggie. “There is nothing wrong with—”

A motorcar horn blasted outside on the street.

A child’s scream pierced the air.

Maggie’s heart lurched, and she spun toward the door.



Nathaniel Harcourt peered out the soot-dusted window as the train slowed and approached the village station.

The conductor walked down the aisle. “Heatherton. This stop is Heatherton.”

The brakes screeched, steam hissed into the air, and the train jerked to a stop. Nate rose from his seat, took his hat and small leather bag from the overhead rack, and started down the aisle. The four-hour trip from London had given him plenty of time to consider the next stage of his journey, but it had done little to ease his apprehension about returning to Morningside.

He stepped down from the train and scanned the platform. Men, women, and children dressed in traveling clothes disembarked behind him, while several others waited to board the train and travel north to Scotland. For a

moment he considered climbing back aboard and continuing the journey, but his stepmother's letter had made it clear. His father was seriously ill, and he should not delay.

The train hissed again, and a steamy cloud puffed out around him. He gripped the handle of his bag and stared across the platform.

A porter approached. "Do you need help with your luggage, sir?"

"Yes, thank you." They made their way to the baggage car, where Nate claimed his trunk and the porter hauled it onto a waiting cart.

"Would you keep my trunk here at the station until I send someone to retrieve it?"

"Yes, sir." The porter quickly tied a ticket to the leather handle, then tore the ticket in half and gave the bottom piece to Nate.

He thanked the porter, passed him a few coins, and then started down the street, intent on finding a horse so he could make the final four-mile journey home to Morningside.

Home . . . His chest tightened, and he focused on those walking past, trying to push aside his conflicting thoughts.

It had been four years since he'd left Morningside, crossed the huge iron bridge spanning the deep ravine with the gardens and stream below, then boarded the train in Heatherton to travel south and accept his naval commission.

He'd been determined to distance himself from his family and his painful past, and that was what he'd done. But today he would travel that same road in the opposite direction to keep his promise to the Almighty and try to make amends.

Was there still time . . . or was it too late?

Could he restore his relationship with his father, or would his father's unexpected illness steal away that opportunity? And what about his stepmother and half sister, Clara? Could he bridge the gap that had always kept them so far apart?

There was only one way to find out. He must finish this last leg of his journey and face his family.

He scanned the village street, and his tension eased a bit. Heatherton

looked much the same as it had the day he'd left. Small shops lined both sides of the street, and at the end he saw the sign for the Red Lion Inn. Mr. Hastings kept a stable behind the inn, and with any luck Nate would find a horse he could hire there.

He walked past the small village hospital and glanced at the arched doorway into the side garden. Was Dr. Albert Hadley still taking care of the medical needs of those in the village and surrounding area? He'd always appreciated the doctor's calm, caring manner and practical wisdom. Nate walked on past Saint Peter's Church, with its tall spire, quiet churchyard, and neatly trimmed cemetery.

The roar of an engine sounded behind him. He grabbed his hat and jumped out of the way as a speeding motorcar raced past.

The driver looked over his shoulder with a broad grin and waved to Nate.

The fool! He ought to slow down and look where he's going before he kills himself or someone else. Nate darted a glance down the street, and his breath hitched in his chest.

A little girl, who looked no more than five or six, stepped into the street, carrying a small parcel.

A surge of energy shot through Nate. "Look out!"

The girl's eyes widened, but rather than turning back, she dashed ahead, directly into the path of the speeding motorcar. The driver blasted his horn, jammed on his brakes, and swerved to the left.

Nate took off running toward the girl, but the car rammed into her, and a heartrending scream tore from her throat. She flew up into the air and landed a few feet away in the middle of the street.

Nate dropped down beside her before the driver had even climbed out of his motorcar. She writhed on the ground, crying. He shot off an urgent prayer as he looked her over. She had not lost consciousness, and he saw no blood. Those were good signs. He laid his hand on her shoulder. "Everything is going to be all right. Try to stay calm."

The little girl squeezed her eyes shut, sobbing and rocking back and forth as she held her leg.

Villagers ran from the shops and gathered around.

“What happened?”

“Isn’t that Mrs. Hayes’s granddaughter?”

“Someone run for the doctor.”

“Let me through!” A young woman pushed past the others. “Violet!” She knelt beside the girl and leaned in close, her back to him.

“My leg!” Tears flowed from the little girl’s eyes.

“What happened?” The young woman looked up at the crowd.

The driver of the motorcar stepped forward, tweed cap in his hand. “I’m sorry, miss. I tried to stop. But I didn’t see her until it was too late.”

“How could you be so careless?” She turned and shifted her fiery gaze to Nate. “We have to move my sister . . .” She blinked and stared at him.

For the first time Nate looked the young woman full in the face, and a shockwave rolled through him. “Maggie?”

Hurt filled her eyes, and she turned away. “We need to move her out of the street.” She looked around at the other villagers, ignoring him.

“I’ll help you.” Nate reached for the little girl.

Maggie’s hand shot out to stop him.

But no one else stepped forward, so he gently scooped Violet off the ground. She cried out as he lifted her.

“What is it, darling?” Maggie leaned in close again, her face lined with agony that matched her sister’s.

“My leg hurts.” A fresh round of tears cascaded down the little girl’s flushed face.

Nate gritted his teeth and looked away. During his naval career, he’d seen many men wounded in battle and transported hundreds of prisoners during the South African Boer War, but seeing his childhood friend and her young sister in this painful situation struck him in a completely different way.

“Step aside.” Dr. Hadley moved through the crowd toward them. “What happened here?”

“Violet was hit by that man in his motorcar.” Maggie pointed to the guilty driver, and the man lowered his head.

“Let’s take her to the hospital.” The doctor looked up at Nate, and his eyebrows rose. “Nathaniel Harcourt?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I didn’t realize you had returned.”

“I’ve just arrived on the train from London. I haven’t even been to Morningside yet.”

The doctor gave a firm nod. “It’s good you’ve come. Your father will be glad to see you. But let’s take this young lady to the hospital.” He set off, clearing a path through the crowd. “Make way, please.”

Nate followed the doctor, carrying Violet. Maggie walked beside him, her eyes fixed on the doctor’s back, her posture rigid. It made sense that she would be upset about Violet’s injuries, but why was she angry with him? He wasn’t responsible for the accident. He glanced her way. “I didn’t know you’d returned to Heatherton.”

She arched one eyebrow. “We’ve lived here for the last four years.”

Surprise rippled through him. How could that be? He’d searched for her after the boating accident, but he’d not been able to find her. “They told me you’d gone to Scotland to live with relatives.”

“Your parents sent us to my great-aunt Beatrice in Edinburgh, but she had no desire to care for us. A few weeks later, she sent us back to Heatherton to stay with Grandmother Hayes. We’ve been here ever since.”

So Maggie had been in Scotland, but his stepmother had told him she was in Glasgow, not Edinburgh. The address she’d given him had turned out to be a butcher shop, and the proprietor said he’d never heard of Margaret Lounsbury.

After that ill-fated trip to Scotland, Nate returned to Morningside and confronted his father and stepmother, demanding to know what had happened to Maggie and Violet. But they both claimed they knew nothing more about where the girls had gone.

He looked back at Maggie. “So you live here now with your grandmother?” That thought lifted his spirits, but the feeling quickly deflated as he observed her cool, impassive expression. Why did she seem so distant? It was almost as if she thought he was somehow responsible for today’s pain and problems.

The doctor pushed open the side door to the hospital and ushered them

inside. It took a moment for Nate's eyes to adjust from the bright sunlit street to the dim doctor's office.

"Bring her in here." The doctor walked into the next room and motioned toward the examination table.

Nate gently placed Violet on the table and stepped back. Maggie moved closer and took her sister's hand. The little girl's tears had slowed, and she looked around the room with a curious expression. Her eyes were blue but much lighter than Maggie's smoky blue-gray eyes. Still, he could see the family resemblance in the shape of Violet's nose and mouth.

The doctor turned to him. "Thank you, Nathaniel. I appreciate your help."

Nate shot a questioning look at Maggie.

For a brief moment he saw the uncertainty in her eyes, or was it hope that he would stay? She quickly masked her emotions and looked away.

"I'll wait in the office," he said. "I'd like to hear how Violet is doing before I go."

"Very well." The doctor turned back to his patient.

Maggie's gaze softened, but she shifted her focus to her sister.

Nate walked into the adjoining office and crossed to the window. Leaning on the windowsill, he looked out at the street. Three children ran past, and a cart pulled by a strong bay drove on toward the center of the village.

How long would it take the doctor to do his examination and discover the extent of Violet's injuries? He glanced at his watch. It was just after four. There were still a few hours of daylight, plenty of time for him to find a horse and make his way to Morningside.

But even if it took longer than expected, he wasn't leaving until he knew Violet was going to be all right. Waiting for word from the doctor would ease his mind and give him a chance to show Maggie that, though they'd been separated for more than four years, she could still count on his help and friendship.

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