

The Rokesby Series:

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The Girl with the Make-
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The Other Miss Bridgerton
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To Sir Phillip, With Love
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BRIDGERTON



TO SIR PHILLIP,
WITH LOVE

JULIA QUINN



PIATKUS

Prologue

*February 1823
Gloucestershire, England*

It was ironic, really, that it had happened on such a sunny day.

The first sunny day in, what had it been—six straight weeks of gray skies, accompanied by the occasional sprinkling of light snow or rain? Even Phillip, who'd thought himself impervious to the vagaries of the weather, had felt his spirits lighten, his smile widen. He'd gone outside—he'd had to. No one could remain indoors during such a splendid display of sunshine.

Especially in the middle of such a gray winter.

Even now, more than a month after it had happened, he couldn't quite believe that the sun had had the temerity to tease him so.

And how was it that he'd been so blind that he'd not expected it? He'd lived with Marina since the day of their marriage. Eight long years to know the

woman. He should have expected it. And in truth . . .

Well, in truth, he *had* expected it. He just hadn't wanted to admit to the expectation. Perhaps he was just trying to delude himself, protect himself, even. To hide from the obvious, hoping that if he didn't think about it, it would never happen.

But it did. And on a sunny day, to boot. God certainly had a sick sense of humor.

He looked down at his glass of whiskey, which was, quite inexplicably, empty. He must have drunk the damned thing, and yet he had no memory of doing so. He didn't feel woozy, at least not as woozy as he should have been. Or even as woozy as he wanted to be.

He stared out the window at the sun, which was slipping low on the horizon. It had been another sunny day today. That probably explained his exceptional melancholy. At least he hoped it did. He wanted an explanation, needed one, for this awful tiredness that seemed to be taking over.

Melancholy terrified him.

More than anything. More than fire, more than war, more than hell itself. The thought of sinking into sadness, of being like *her* . . .

Marina had been melancholy. Marina had spent her entire life, or at least the entire life he'd known, melancholy. He couldn't remember the sound of her laughter, and in truth, he wasn't sure that he'd ever known it.

It had been a sunny day, and—

He squeezed his eyes shut, not certain whether the motion was meant to urge the memory or dispel it.

It had been a sunny day, and . . .

* * *

"Never thought you'd feel the likes of that on your skin again, eh, Sir Phillip?"

Phillip Crane turned his face to the sun, closing his eyes as he let the warmth spread over his skin. "It's perfect," he murmured. "Or it would be, if it weren't so bloody cold."

Miles Carter, his secretary, chuckled. "It's not as cold as that. The lake hasn't frozen this year. Just a few patchy spots."

Reluctantly, Phillip turned away from the sun and opened his eyes. "It isn't spring, though."

"If you were wishing for spring, sir, perhaps you should have consulted a calendar."

Phillip regarded him with a sideways glance. "Do I pay you for such impertinence?"

"Indeed. And rather handsomely, too."

Phillip smiled to himself as both men paused to enjoy the sun for a few moments longer.

"I thought you didn't mind the gray," Miles said conversationally, once they'd resumed their trek to Phillip's greenhouse.

"I don't," Phillip said, striding along with the confidence of a natural athlete. "But just because I don't mind an overcast sky doesn't mean I don't prefer the sun." He paused, thought for a moment. "Be sure to tell Nurse Millsby to take the children outside today. They'll need warm coats, of course, and hats and mittens and the like, but they ought to get a little sun on their faces. They've been cooped up far too long."

"As have we all," Miles murmured.

Phillip chuckled. "Indeed." He glanced over his shoulder at his greenhouse. He probably ought to take care of his correspondence now, but he had some seeds he needed to sort through, and truly,

there was no reason he couldn't conduct his business with Miles in an hour or so. "Go on," he said to Miles. "Find Nurse Millsby. You and I can deal later. You know you hate the greenhouse, anyway."

"Not this time of year," Miles said. "The heat is rather welcome."

Phillip arched a brow as he inclined his head toward Romney Hall. "Are you calling my ancestral home drafty?"

"All ancestral homes are drafty."

"True enough," Phillip said with a grin. He rather liked Miles. He'd hired him six months earlier to help with the mountains of paperwork and details that seemed to accumulate from the running of his small property. Miles was quite good. Young, but good. And his dry sense of humor was certainly welcome in a house where laughter was never in abundance. The servants would never dare joke with Phillip, and Marina . . . well, it went without saying that Marina did not laugh or tease.

The children sometimes made Phillip laugh, but that was a different sort of humor, and besides, most of the time he did not know what to say to them. He tried, but then he felt too awkward, too big, too strong, if such a thing were possible. And then he just found himself shooing them off, telling them to go back to their nurse.

It was easier that way.

"Go on, then," Phillip said, sending Miles off on a task he probably should have done himself. He hadn't seen his children yet today, and he supposed he ought to, but he didn't want to spoil the day by saying something stern, which he inevitably seemed to do.

He'd find them while they were off on their nature walk with Nurse Millsby. That would be a good idea. Then he could point out some sort of plant and tell them about it, and everything would remain perfectly simple and benign.

Phillip entered his greenhouse and shut the door behind him, taking a welcome breath of the moist air. He'd studied botany at Cambridge, taken a first, even, and in truth, he'd probably have taken up an academic life if his older brother had not died at Waterloo, thrusting the second-born Phillip into the role of landowner and country gentleman.

He supposed it could have been worse. He could have been landowner and city gentleman, after all. At least here he was able to pursue his botanical pursuits in relative serenity.

He bent over his workbench, examining his latest project—a strain of peas that he was trying to breed to grow fatter and plumper in the pod. No luck yet, though. This latest batch was not just shriveled but had even turned yellow, which had not been the expected result at all.

Phillip frowned, then allowed himself a small smile as he moved to the back of the greenhouse to gather his supplies. He never minded too terribly when his experiments did not produce the expected outcome. In his opinion, necessity had never been the mother of invention.

Accidents. It was all about accidents. No scientist would admit to it, of course, but most great invention occurred while one was attempting to solve some other problem entirely.

He chuckled as he swept the shriveled peas aside. At this rate, he'd cure gout by the end of the year.

Back to work. Back to work. He bent over his seed collection, smoothing them out so that he could examine them all. He needed just the right one for—

He looked up and out the freshly washed glass. A movement across the field caught his eye. A flash of red.

Red. Phillip smiled to himself as he shook his head. It must be Marina. Red was her favorite color, something that he'd always found odd. Anyone who spent any time with her would have surely thought she'd prefer something darker, more somber.

He watched as she disappeared into the wooded copse, then got back to work. It was rare for Marina to venture outside. These days she didn't often leave the confines of her bedchamber. Phillip was happy to see her out in the sun. Maybe it would restore her spirits. Not completely, of course. Phillip didn't think even the sun had the ability to do that. But maybe a bright, warm day would be enough to draw her out for a few hours, bring a small smile to her face.

Heaven knew the children could use that. They visited their mother in her room almost every evening, but it wasn't enough.

And Phillip knew that this lack was not made up for by him.

He sighed, a wave of guilt washing over him. He was not the sort of father they needed, he knew that. He tried to tell himself that he was doing his best, that he was succeeding in what was his only goal when it came to parenthood—that he *not* behave in the manner of his own father.

But still he knew it wasn't enough.

With resolute motions, he pushed himself away from his workbench. The seeds could wait. His children could probably wait, too, but that didn't mean they should. And he ought to take them on their nature walk, not Nurse Millsby, who didn't know a deciduous tree from a coniferous and would most likely tell them that a rose was a daisy and . . .

He glanced out the window again, reminding himself that it was February. Nurse Millsby wasn't likely to locate any sort of flower in this weather, but still, it didn't excuse the fact that *he* ought to take the children on their nature walk. It was the one sort of children's activity at which he truly excelled, and he ought not shirk the responsibility.

He strode out of the greenhouse but then stopped, not even a third of the way back to Romney Hall. If he was going to fetch the children, he ought to take them out to see their mother. They craved her company, even when she did nothing more than pat them on the head. Yes, they should find Marina. That would be even more beneficial than a nature walk.

But he knew from experience that he ought not make assumptions about Marina's state of mind. Just because she'd ventured outside did not mean that she was feeling well. And he hated when the children saw her in one of her moods.

Phillip turned around and headed out toward the copse where he'd seen Marina disappear just a few moments earlier. He walked with nearly twice the speed of Marina; it wouldn't take very long to catch up to her and ascertain her mood. He could be back at the nursery before the children set out with Nurse Millsby.

He walked through the woods, easily following Marina's path. The ground was moist, and Marina must have been wearing heavy boots, because her prints had sunk into the earth with clear definition. They led down the slight incline and out of the woods, then onto a grassy patch.

"Damn," Phillip muttered, the word barely audible as the wind picked up around him. It was impossible to see her footprints on the grass. He used his hand to shade his eyes from the sun and scanned the horizon, looking for a telltale scrap of red.

Not near the abandoned cottage, nor at Phillip's field of experimental grains, nor at the large boulder that Phillip had spent so many hours clambering upon when he was a child. He turned north, his eyes narrowing when he finally saw her. She was heading toward the lake.

The lake.

Phillip's lips parted as he stared down at her form, moving slowly toward the water's edge. He wasn't quite frozen; it was more that he was... suspended... as his mind took in the strange sight. Marina didn't swim. He didn't even know if she could. He supposed she was aware that there was a lake on the grounds, but in truth, he'd never known her to go there, not in the eight years they'd been married. He started walking toward her, his feet somehow recognizing what his mind refused to accept. As she stepped into the shallows, he picked up speed, still too far to do anything but call out her name.

But if she heard him, she made no indication, just continued her slow and steady progress into the depths.

"Marina!" he screamed, now breaking into a run. He was still a good minute away, even moving at top speed. "Marina!"

She reached the point where the bottom dropped off, and then she dropped off, too, disappearing under the gunmetal gray of the surface, her red cloak floating along the top for a few seconds before being sucked under after her.

He yelled her name again, even though she couldn't possibly hear. He skidded and stumbled down the hill leading to the lake, then had just enough presence of mind to yank off his coat and boots before diving into the freezing-cold water. She'd been under barely a minute; his mind recognized that that was probably not enough time to drown, but every second it took him to find her was one second toward her death.

He'd swum in the lake countless times, knew exactly where the bottom dropped off, and he reached that critical point with swift, even strokes, barely noticing the drag of the water against his heavy clothes.

He could find her. He *had* to find her.

Before it was too late.

He dove down, his eyes scanning the murky water. Marina must have kicked up some of the sand from the bottom, and he had surely done the same, because the fine silt was swirling around him, the puffy opaque clouds making it difficult to see.

But in the end, Marina was saved by her one colorful quirk, and Phillip pumped through the water, down to the bottom where he saw the red of her cloak floating through the water like a languorous

kite. She did not fight him as he pulled her to the surface; indeed, she had already lost consciousness and was nothing more than a dead weight in his arms.

They broke out into the air, and he took great, big gasps to fill his burning lungs. For a moment he could do nothing but breathe, his body recognizing that it had to save itself before he could save anyone else. Then he pulled her along to the shore, careful to keep her face above water, even though she didn't seem to be breathing.

Finally, they reached the water's edge, and he dragged her upon the narrow strip of dirt and pebbles that separated the water from the grass. With frantic movements he felt in front of her face for air, but there was none emerging from her lips.

He didn't know what to do, hadn't thought he'd ever have to save someone from drowning, so he just did what seemed most sensible and heaved her over his lap, face down, whacking her on the back. Nothing happened at first, but after the fourth violent thrust, she coughed, and a stream of murky water erupted from her mouth.

He turned her over quickly. "Marina?" he asked urgently, lightly slapping her face. "Marina?"

She coughed again, her body wracked by spasmodic tremors. Then she began to suck in air, her lungs forcing her to live, even when her soul desired something else.

"Marina," Phillip said, his voice shaking with relief. "Thank God." He didn't love her, had never really loved her, but she was his wife, and she was the mother of his children, and she was, deep down, beneath her unshakable cloak of sorrow and despair, a

good and fine person. He may not have loved her, but he did not want her death.

She blinked, her eyes unfocused. And then, finally, she seemed to realize where she was, who he was, and she whispered, "No."

"I've got to get you back to the house," he said gruffly, startled by how angry he was over that single word.

No.

How dare she refuse his rescue? Would she give up on life just because she was *sad*? Did her melancholy amount to more than their two children? In the balance of life, did a bad mood weigh more than their need for a mother?

"I'm taking you home," he bit out, heaving her none too gently into his arms. She was breathing now, and clearly in possession of her faculties, misguided though they may be. There was no need to treat her like a delicate flower.

"No," she sobbed quietly. "Please don't. I don't want . . . I don't . . ."

"You're going home," he stated, trudging up the hill, oblivious to the chill wind turning his sodden clothes to ice; oblivious, even, to the rocky soil pressing into his unshod feet.

"I can't," she whispered, with what seemed like her last ounce of energy.

And as Phillip carried his burden home, all he could think was how apt those words were.

I can't.

In a way, it seemed to sum up her entire life.

By nightfall, it became apparent that fever might succeed where the lake had failed.

Phillip had carried Marina home as quickly as he was able, and, with the aid of Mrs. Hurley, his housekeeper, had stripped her of her icy garments and tried to warm her beneath the goose-down quilt that had been the centerpiece of her trousseau eight years earlier.

"What happened?" Mrs. Hurley had gasped when he staggered through the kitchen door. He hadn't wanted to use the main entrance, where he might be seen by his children, and besides, the kitchen door was closer by a good twenty yards.

"She fell in the lake," he said gruffly.

Mrs. Hurley gave him a look that was somehow dubious and sympathetic all at the same time, and he knew that she knew the truth. She had worked for the Cranes since their marriage; she knew Marina's moods.

She had shooed him out of the room once they had Marina in bed, insisting that he change his own clothing before he caught his death as well. He had returned, though, to Marina's side. That was his place as her husband, he thought guiltily, a place he had avoided in recent years.

It was depressing to be with Marina. It was *hard*.

But now wasn't the time to shirk his duties, and so he sat at her bedside throughout the day and into the night. He mopped her brow when she began to perspire, tried to pour lukewarm broth down her throat when she was calm.

He told her to fight, even though he knew his words fell on deaf ears.

Three days later she was dead.

It was what she'd wanted, but that was little com-

fort as Phillip faced his children, twins, just turned seven years old, and tried to explain that their mother was gone. He sat in their nursery, his large frame too big for any of their tot-sized chairs. But he sat, anyway, twisted like a pretzel, and forced himself to meet their gazes as he wrenched out the words.

They said little, which was unlike them. But they didn't look surprised, which Phillip found disturbing.

"I—I'm sorry," he choked out, once he reached the end of his speech. He loved them so much, and he failed them in so many ways. He barely knew how to be a father to them; how in hell was he meant to take on the role of mother as well?

"It's not your fault," Oliver said, his brown eyes capturing his father's with an intensity that was unsettling. "She fell in the lake, didn't she? You didn't push her."

Phillip only nodded, unsure of how to respond.

"Is she happy now?" Amanda asked softly.

"I think so," Phillip said. "She gets to watch you all the time now from heaven, so she must be happy."

The twins seemed to consider that for quite some time. "I hope she's happy," Oliver finally said, his voice more resolute than his expression. "Maybe she won't cry anymore."

Phillip felt his breath catch in his throat. He hadn't realized that they had heard Marina's sobs. She only seemed to sink so low late at night; their room was directly above hers, but he'd always assumed they'd already fallen asleep when their mother started to cry.

Amanda nodded her agreement, her little blond

head bobbing up and down. "If she's happy now," she said, "then I'm glad she's gone."

"She's not gone," Oliver cut in. "She's dead."

"No, she's gone," Amanda persisted.

"It's the same thing," Phillip said flatly, wishing he had something to tell them other than the truth. "But I think she's happy now."

And in a way, that was the truth, too. It was what Marina had wanted, after all. Maybe it was all she had wanted all along.

Amanda and Oliver were quiet for a long while, both keeping their eyes on the floor as their legs swung from their perch on Oliver's bed. They looked so small, sitting there on a bed that was clearly too high for them. Phillip frowned. How was it that he'd never noticed this before? Shouldn't they be on lower beds? What if they fell off in the night?

Or maybe they were too big for all that. Maybe they didn't fall out of bed any longer. Maybe they never had.

Maybe he truly was an abominable father. Maybe he should know these things.

Maybe . . . maybe . . . He closed his eyes and sighed. Maybe he should stop thinking quite so much and simply try his best and be happy with that.

"Are you going to go away?" Amanda asked, raising her head.

He looked into her eyes, so blue, so like her mother's. "No," he whispered fiercely, kneeling before her and taking her tiny hands in his own. They looked so small in his grasp, so fragile.

"No," he repeated. "I'm not going away. I'm not ever going away. . . ."

* * *

Phillip looked down at his whiskey glass. It was empty again. Funny how a whiskey glass could go empty even after one filled it four times.

He hated remembering. He wasn't sure what was the worst. Was it the dive underwater or the moment Mrs. Hurley had turned to him and said, "She's gone"?

Or was it his children, the sorrow on their faces, the fear in their eyes?

He lifted the glass to his lips, letting the final drops slide into his mouth. The worst part was definitely his children. He'd told them he wouldn't ever leave them, and he hadn't—he wouldn't—but his simple presence wasn't enough. They needed more. They needed someone who knew how to be a parent, who knew how to speak to them and understand them and get them to mind and behave.

And since he couldn't very well get them another father, he supposed he ought to think about finding them a mother. It was too soon, of course. He couldn't marry anyone until his prescribed period of mourning was completed, but that didn't mean he couldn't look.

He sighed, slumping in his seat. He needed a wife. Almost any wife would do. He didn't care what she looked like. He didn't care if she had money. He didn't care if she could do sums in her head or speak French or even ride a horse.

She just had to be happy.

Was that so much to want in a wife? A smile, at least once a day. Maybe even the sound of her laughter?