

LIBRIS

We know
books

Novels by Sarah MacLean

These Summer Storms

HELL'S BELLES

Bombshell

Heartbreaker

Knockout

THE BAREKNUCKLE BASTARDS

Wicked and the Wallflower

Brazen and the Beast

Daring and the Duke

SCANDAL & SCOUNDREL

The Rogue Not Taken

A Scot in the Dark

The Day of the Duchess

RULES OF SCOUNDRELS

A Rogue by Any Other Name

One Good Earl Deserves a Lover

No Good Duke Goes Unpunished

Never Judge a Lady by Her Cover

LOVE BY NUMBERS

Nine Rules to Break When Romancing a Rake

Ten Ways to Be Adored When Landing a Lord

Eleven Scandals to Start to Win a Duke's Heart

Sarah MacLean

these

summer

storms


PIATKUS

LBRIS

We know
books

**these
summer
storms**

CHAPTER

1

THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT TRAINS.

If she marked the minutes of her life, Alice Storm would not be surprised to discover that she'd spent nearly a third of them in transit:

- The shiny crimson bicycle that had been her seventh-birthday present and most prized possession, until her brother had sent it flying into Narragansett Bay, never to be recovered.
- The white rowboat her father had captained into that same salty sea every Saturday in July for her entire childhood, because he insisted on *facing nature as God intended*.
- The endless line of nondescript black town cars with silent drivers that ferried her from private school to private art classes to the Storm family's Park Avenue penthouse, New York City muffled and dim beyond the window.

- The skateboard she'd ridden into a tree one Sunday morning during her first year at Amherst—determined to prove herself a completely ordinary eighteen-year-old—resulting in an arm broken in three places.
- The helicopter that airlifted her to Boston to be pinned back together and returned her to school in time for a nine A.M. Art History midterm, before her classmates could discover there was nothing ordinary about her.
- The private jets that took her around the globe whenever her father issued an international summons on a whim.
- The commercial jet that had taken her to Prague eighteen months earlier, diamond ring tucked into her boyfriend's carry-on bag.
- The subway car she'd been on that afternoon when her phone had rung and stolen her breath—Incoming call . . . *Elisabeth Storm* (never *Mom*)—all beige walls and harsh lights and advertisements for clear skin and uncluttered apartments and that one William Carlos Williams poem about plums and iceboxes and forgiveness and the parts of us that will never change.

And still, there was something about trains.

Probably because she'd discovered those herself. All the other ways she'd traveled through the world had belonged to someone else. Were shared with someone else. But trains . . . they were her secret.

They did not come with flight plans, no siblings jockeying for position inside, no mothers calling for champagne, no fathers playing silent judge. They did not come unmoored. Instead they remained locked into their path, weighty and competent, unchanging. Unable to be sent over a cliff and into the sea. A marvel of modernity that ran counter to all the technology that came after them. Solid. Even. Stable. Constant.

Alice dropped her suitcase onto the luggage rack inside the door of the train car and found the first empty row, tossing her worn olive green

canvas satchel onto the aisle seat and sliding over to the window, hoping that a Wednesday night on the 9:32 P.M. Northeast Regional would reward her with a row to herself in the last few hours of peace before what was to come.

Before she faced the barrage of family—with one glaring, irreversible absence.

Through the window, on the train platform beyond, a group of twenty-somethings tumbled down the escalator, laughing and shouting, a collection of duffels and weekender bags, bright smiles, sundresses, shorts and sunglasses, as though night hadn't fallen outside. And maybe it hadn't for them. Maybe they were in that gorgeous moment in life when there was no such thing as the dark. Instead, it was all daytime, full of promise and empty of fear.

Behind them, a freckle-faced, redheaded family of five, a teenager in hoodie and headphones, twin girls no older than ten, and their parents, loaded down with suitcases and backpacks and a *Paris Review* tote that might have once been for literary cachet, but was now for stainless steel water bottles and organic snacks.

A middle-aged Black woman in flowing linen, her tiny silver roller bag the only evidence that she was traveling. A tall, stern-faced white man in his thirties, leather duffel in hand, backpack slung over his shoulder. An elderly, ruddy-cheeked man in a cream-colored windbreaker, pushed in a wheelchair by an Amtrak employee in a trademark red cap.

One by one, they piled onto the train.

Alice had been wrong; the train wouldn't be empty. Instead, it would be packed full—laden with a few hundred New Yorkers headed north for a weekend of cobalt skies and gray-green ocean during the most magical time of year in New England, when the rest of the world was back to school and work and Northeasterners were spoiled with one last week of sun-soaked seclusion, clinging to the promise of endless summer.

She'd forgotten it was Labor Day weekend.

The lapse in memory seemed impossible, considering she'd left her

freshly painted, newly organized classroom in Brooklyn six hours earlier, planning her own final long summer weekend as she waited for the subway. Pilates that afternoon. The Grand Army Plaza farmers' market for the last of the heirloom tomatoes. Governors Island on Saturday with Gabi and Roxanne, who insisted she leave her empty apartment. A long Sunday, painting in the last of the summer glow, before school made the days too short for sunlight.

Then her phone rang, and she'd forgotten.

Leaning back against the rough fabric of her seat, Alice focused on the train schedule, announced over a staticky loudspeaker, the conductor's voice thick with New England—*Old Saybrook, New London, Wickford*—loud enough to keep people from the wrong train, Amtrak hoped—*Providence, Back Bay, South Station*—loud enough to keep her from remembering.

The train lurched into motion, the awkward first step before it gained speed and momentum, heavy and smooth. Familiar comfort.

Next stop, New Rochelle.

She exhaled. Four hours to what came next.

"Is someone with you?"

It shouldn't have surprised her but she startled anyway, straightening to meet the serious, gray gaze of the man she'd seen on the platform earlier—tall and stern. Taller now that he was close. Sterner, too.

Dark brows rose, punctuating the question as he tilted his chin in the direction of the seat next to her, where her ancient canvas satchel sat, forgotten.

No one was with her.

"No." She grabbed the bag and shoved it to her feet. "Sorry."

The noise he made in reply was almost impossible to hear above the sound of the train on the track, the white noise of the air-conditioning, the slide of his overnight bag onto the rack above. He folded himself into the space she'd cleared, knees pressed to the back of the seat in front of him.

On another day, she might have paid closer attention, but she did not have time for noticing him. In fact, she vaguely resented his pres-

ence for reminding her that she was single again, for filling up the seat with his long legs and the kind of judgment that came from strangers who had no idea that you'd had *a day*.

That you were preparing to have *multiple days*.

Five days. And then she was out. She could survive five days.

She cleared her throat and adjusted her position in the seat, closing her eyes, trying to lose herself in the rhythmic thud of the wheels as the train shot out of the tunnel in Queens and they left New York City behind.

An hour into the ride, they pressed east along the southern coast of New England, and Alice, unable to sleep, phone dead, and lacking capacity to focus on the book she'd shoved into her bag as she'd rushed from her apartment that afternoon, peered into the inky darkness outside the window, where Long Island Sound lay still and flat and invisible in the distance, beyond the saltwater marshland of the Connecticut coast.

It would have been impossible to see anyway, thanks to the late hour and the dark sky, but the view had competition—the fluorescent lights reflecting the inside of the train car against the glass, casting a pale glow over the cluttered shelf across the aisle, full of sleeping bags and suitcases and a large tote bag with electric pink piping, pickleball paddle jammed into the side pocket. Beneath the collection of travel detritus, two teenage girls laughed at a curly-haired boy hanging over the seat in front of them, a goofy smile on his face. On another night, Alice might have smiled at the picture they made—late-summer perfection. But tonight, it was a different part of the reflection that distracted her. The bright, shining rectangle glowing in her neighbor's lap.

His phone was open to some social app, one with endless scroll.

He should turn that off. Endless scroll rotted a person's brain. It had been rotting hers before she boarded the train, searching for the dopamine hit of makeup tutorials and cat videos . . . antidotes to her mother's call—the first she'd made to Alice in five years.

Her seatmate paused, a headline impossibly large against the darkness outside. She had no trouble reading the text in the mirrored reflection.

His thumb hovered over the link.

Don't, she willed, not sure she would be able to look away, even though she knew the story within. Had known it since she was born. Franklin Storm had stepped into his parents' garage in North Boston at the age of seventeen and changed computing and the world with \$1,107 and a dream. He'd made computers large and small, brought them into homes and schools, and placed them in pockets and on wrists the world over.

That was the first paragraph. The ones that followed would be about his company, his vast collection of art, his philanthropy, his charm, his daredevil tendencies (no one should be too surprised by a gliding accident, really). And then, his family.

There'd be photos, probably from his seventieth birthday, taken that past April—the ones Alice had pored over in the Style section of the *Times*. Captions. A footnote about the child not pictured (not invited). A reminder of why.

Don't open it.

He didn't. Alice breathed again.

Swallowing the urge to tell him to read a book or something, she reached down and pulled a newspaper out of her bag. She hadn't held a print newspaper since she was a kid, when a stack of them would be delivered to the apartment every morning.

Still, she smoothed her hand over the front page of that morning's *New York Times*, printed twenty hours earlier, rendered instantly obsolete in this world where (allegedly) BREAKING NEWS came all day, all hours, directly to a person's preferred rectangle, there, then gone. Turned instantly into the past to make room for the future—a shift so quick that the present simply disappeared.

Why had she bought it? Alice rubbed a thumb across the words, tattooing herself with the ink of yesterday's news—the Before. Tomorrow's paper would be the After.

The top of the fold on the front page would be devoted to her father's death—the biggest story of the week. Of the year.

Longer for Alice (and her therapist).

She traced a headline about inflation. Another about unhoused New Yorkers. A third about the solar power revolution. Stories that were more important than anything the paper would say the next day.

Stories she couldn't read because there, in her peripheral vision, her seatmate had turned over his phone, and the back of it gleamed smooth, black obsidian, without any reflection, its only mark a swirling silver S, like the eye of a hurricane.

Years ago, when she was young, that insignia had words that came with it—repeated over and over on television commercials. Radio plays. Print advertisements. The whole world knew them.

Storm Inside™

The world didn't know the half of it.

CHAPTER

2

BEFORE THE ROBBER BARONS of the Gilded Age changed the face of American business with steel and banks and oil, Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt changed the face of American travel, snapping up and consolidating more than a dozen small railway lines and amassing a fortune that few had ever seen outside of royalty. (Who needs titles when you can have trains?)

In 1870, Cornelius Vanderbilt II—nepo-grandbaby to Cornelius Vanderbilt, Original Flavor—did what rich young men have done for as long as they have been rich young men: He used his grandfather's money and power and influence to make it easier for him to have friends over for parties.

With his brother, young Cornelius established the Newport and Wickford Railroad and Steamboat Company, overseeing a mere three and a half miles of train track from the main rail line connecting New York and Boston to the port of Wickford, RI, a sleepy town with wildly desirable geography. Wickford was located on the western edge of Narragansett Bay, the 147-square-mile estuary that divided the western, mainland half of Rhode Island from the eastern side of the state, an

archipelago where New York City's wealthiest nineteenth-century families built the over-the-top mansions that would remain a hallmark of Rhode Island tourism and American film for more than a century.

It was the Vanderbilts who put Wickford on the map, quite literally, plucking valuable farmland and ocean views from unsuspecting Rhode Islanders (eminent domain isn't just for present-day billionaires) and laying the track that would become the safest, easiest journey to Newport for New York's elite, along with their dogs, servants, and secrets. It also opened up access to a collection of small private islands peppering the Bay.

On that particular Wednesday before Labor Day, as Amtrak Northeast Regional train 1603 crossed the Rhode Island border, it occurred to Alice that if the Vanderbilts got one look at the train's worn maroon carpet and polyester-blend upholstery, they would have bemoaned the ceding of rail travel to the common man and paid someone to set the whole thing on fire.

Robber barons would robber baron. Of that, Alice was certain.

She'd been raised by one, after all.

With a soft "Excuse me," to the long legs in the aisle seat, Alice gathered her bags and headed for one of the three doors that would open to the elevated platform of the once-again-sleepy town—no longer a hub of travel for the wealthy and famous.

Staring at her newly charged phone, she ignored the red bubbles at the corner of every app she used regularly. Fourteen new voicemails. Sixty-three new emails. One-hundred-and-twenty-one new text messages.

She swiped to a rideshare app, her thumb hovering over the green square as she waited for the SOS at the top of the screen to turn to bars indicating service. And tried not to impart double meaning into that SOS.

"This is my stop, too."

She whirled to face the words, and the man standing there. Tall, stern, long legs, rotted brain. Nice voice, quiet and deep. The kind of voice that made someone want to listen. Alice hadn't noticed that before.

"Sorry?"

"I'm only saying it so you don't think that I'm following you."

It was a perfectly nice thing to say. But Alice Storm, third child of TRAILBLAZING GENIUS FRANKLIN STORM, DEAD AT 70, had spent a lifetime being followed.

The train began to slow.

"That sounds like something someone following me would say."

The corner of his straight, serious mouth tilted up. Barely. "Scout's honor."

Before she could respond, the conductor came through the automatic doors. "Wickford?"

It came out like *Wickfahd*, and Alice couldn't help her smile at the sound of her childhood. "Yes."

"Nice place for Labor Day weekend," the conductor noted.

Her smile faded.

"Sure is," the man who wasn't following her replied.

"Gonna get some lobster?" *Lobstah*.

The train stopped and the doors opened with a heavy slide, a modern-day portcullis. "Sure are."

Surprised by his use of the plural, Alice looked back. He wasn't looking at her.

The conductor tipped his chin toward the train platform. "Lucky. Have a good weekend."

"Thank you," Alice said, stepping down onto the platform as her neighbor replied, "You too."

The words were lost in the rhythm of the wheels, steady and reliable, already headed north. Alice hesitated, watching the train go and, for a wild moment, wondered what would happen if she ran after it, like in a movie, leaping from the end of the platform, catching the end of the last car. Riding it all the way to Boston. *Hero shit*, Gabi would say.

Alice sighed. The likelihood of her catching the back end of an accelerating train aside (zero likelihood, for the record), doing so would change nothing. The news would still be the same.

That, and her family was already expecting her not to show up, and she refused to give them the satisfaction of being right.

Alice's phone showed two bars, thankfully, and she made quick work of summoning a ride. It was too far of a walk to the docks, and too late to wait inside anywhere—nothing in the quiet town was open past ten, even on the last week of summer.

She set her bags down in the cone of a bright yellow streetlamp—staying outside the light to avoid the potato bugs that danced around an enormous NO LITTERING sign—and settled in for the twenty-minute wait for the driver she'd been assigned, watching as the handful of other passengers piled into cars lined up along the street. A few happy hugs and excited hellos and slammed trunks later, the street was empty except for two cars and an SUV parked on the far side, dark and quiet.

Leaving Alice alone.

Or, alone-ish. Thirty feet away, her neighbor stood under a streetlamp of his own—braving the potato bugs—phone in hand.

Looking her way, he lifted the rectangle as though it meant something. "My ride . . . isn't here."

"It's okay."

"I don't want you to think—"

"That you're following me."

He nodded once. Firm. "Right."

"You're doing a good job of throwing me off the scent."

"Good."

A few minutes passed. Her driver, Benny, would arrive in seventeen minutes in a gray Honda. Which meant she'd be at the wharf in twenty-five minutes. On the island in an hour.

If she was lucky, everyone would be asleep. It would be almost two in the morning. Everyone should be asleep.

Please let them all be asleep.

A rumble sounded in the distance, far away and almost unnoticeable, the heavy promise of a nearby storm, the kind that came on summer nights by the water, streaks of lightning and roaring thunder and rain that soaked you through the moment it started, before it blew past, leaving clear skies and bright stars in its wake.

Dad loved a summer storm.

The thought whispered through her, and she sucked in a breath at