

# *A Lesson in Forgiveness*

## Chapter 1

Gentle rocking. Back and forth, back and forth. The only sound was the rhythm of the rocking. No smells or tastes or feelings. Only the rocking. It was soothing and relaxing. Mostly, it was hypnotic. No pain, no worries, no anxieties.

Then, it ended, abruptly. The carriage hit a pothole and Ginny was jarred so hard she hit her head against the seat. Her eyes snapped open. She held the carriage seat as if it was a life preserver. That was what it felt like. She was drowning in a sea of mis-comprehension and the feel of the wood and cushion were the only things that kept her afloat.

Her breathing was shallow and sweat began to form on her forehead. The carriage was small and she was not the only occupant. Across from her were two people, a man and a woman, both older, with graying hair and wrinkles around their eyes and mouths. Both were asleep, the man slumped against the carriage and the woman slumped against the man.

Ginny began to examine the rest of the interior. The rocking continued, except now, it wasn't so soothing. There were doors on either side, with small windows that were currently open to allow for air flow. Right beside each door was what looked like an oil lamp, although neither was lit since it was daytime. Everything was a stained dark wood, except for the cushions, which were a lively red velvety material.

Staring out the small windows, Ginny saw a whole lot of nothing, trees and fields along a seemingly never ending dirt road. No highway, no cars, no telephone poles and no houses.

She closed her eyes and took a deep, shaky breath. *Where the hell am I now?* she wondered, keeping her eyes closed against the

reality that she was still not home. Ginny had just lived a strange woman's life in medieval times. She was a romance novel heroine, saving the day and winning the hunk. Of course, that wasn't her real life. The life she left behind in 2008, working as a physician's assistant and living the single life of a thirty year old.

The last thing Ginny could remember was walking away from Ian, her mega-hunk, right before she passed out. *Passed out?* she thought disbelievingly. *More like passed to yet another person's life I will have to live.*

Reaching up with both hands, covered in fine, soft gloves, Ginny began to rub her face. *If I keep my eyes closed, maybe it will all go away. I will be back where I'm supposed to be and Lisa and I can have a big laugh over my outrageous dreams.*

It was not to be Ginny's lucky day. Slowly, she opened her eyes to see the two other occupants of the carriage staring at her. The woman had large brown eyes and a stern, down-turned mouth. The man, whose salt and pepper hair was cut very short, had sympathetic green eyes and a kindly face. Ginny had hoped to remember some information on who she was currently occupying before she had to speak, but since it wasn't her lucky day, she wasn't to be disappointed.

"You will not fade in the background here, young lady. It is your responsibility to make a fine marriage and no man wants a woman who cannot hold a conversation," said the stern looking woman. Ginny surmised she was her mother and she was not happy with her.

The man held a hand over the woman's hand and said more gently, "We don't want you to be alone, Bethany. We want you to have a happy life. Your mother and I want to see you settled before..." Her father, she presumed, didn't finish his sentence. It was probably a conversation he'd already had with her on many occasions.

Ginny didn't know what exactly was going on, but she could figure most of it out. "Yes, sir," was all she replied, hoping it would put an end to the conversation and she could sit quietly waiting to find out who she was. Again, she was not so lucky.

"Two seasons! Two! You should be betrothed by now. There were so many fine gentlemen available. If you would just talk to some of them. I can count how many times you danced on one hand. You are such a beautiful girl." Her mother let out an exasperated sigh and

turned to look out the carriage window.

"I will try harder, mother," she replied, figuring it was what she was supposed to say. Since the woman continued to stare out the window, Ginny figured it was also the same thing she'd said in the past. Or rather, the same thing Bethany had said. Before she could expound more on a subject she was completely unfamiliar with, there was a knock from above.

"There now, it seems we have almost arrived," her father smiled openly. "It will be a pleasure to finally meet Lord Whitmore in person. His correspondence has been most helpful."

Ginny had no idea what that meant, so she decided to keep quiet. The carriage turned down a long drive and suddenly her mother looked almost excited.

"There. The house. Oh, my, how beautiful." The woman was practically hanging out the window. "Come, Bethany and look. I do believe that Lord Whitmore is unmarried," she said looking to her husband for confirmation.

"Yes, dear, he is unmarried, but I would not even try to make a match there. I am told he is not interested in marrying."

"He has no heir, therefore, he must be interested in marrying," she stated matter-of-factly.

"There will be enough marriageable men there for our daughter to choose from. Lord Whitmore is our host. Do not disturb him with your plans." Ginny could tell by the look on his face that he meant what he said and he would broach no argument. Apparently, the woman knew this as well.

"Very well, dear. I am told that Lord Clarendon will be in attendance as well. Although his reputation is most disturbing."

The two continued to discuss the possibilities and argue their pros and cons. Ginny, smartly, kept her mouth shut and listened. She had yet to even know who she was, so she wasn't about to offer up any advice. Ginny did want to know what was so disturbing about Lord Clarendon's reputation. It seemed an interesting topic, rather than how much money each unattached man brought to the table.

The feel of the carriage changed suddenly as they approached the house. Instead of the dirt road, they now rode on cobblestones. Ginny wasn't paying much attention, so when the carriage did finally stop, she was nearly thrown forward onto her parent's laps. Her

mother gave her another stern look, while her father pretended not to notice. Before anyone could say anything, the door was opened and small steps lowered. Ginny's new father got out first, turning to assist her new mother down the steps. Taking a deep breath to steady herself, Ginny got up to exit as well. Grabbing her new father's hand, Ginny got her first look at the house.

House was not the word she would use. Perhaps, mansion or manor, but definitely not house. The carriage had entered some type of courtyard, with stone steps that led to huge double doors. Her new parents led the way up the stairs into an entrance hall that was probably bigger than Ginny's whole house in her time. The floors were marble tile, alternating black and white. In the center of the room, there was a beautiful inlay of a coat of arms, with dark reds and greens.

There was little furniture in the cavernous hall. Only a few benches and tables, set back against the walls. The grand staircase was in the center of the room, a good thirty feet from the doors. It looked like mahogany, darkly stained and richly ornamented with huge finial balls on either side. Ginny's eyes must have been open wide as she perused the entranceway because her new mother snapped her fan and hit her in the arm.

"Close your gaping mouth," she hissed at her as a man came from behind the stairs and started in their direction.

Her father was the first to speak. "Good afternoon. Lord Whitmore, I presume."

"Indeed. You must be Mr. Hamilton. It is a pleasure to finally meet you in person, sir." Lord Whitmore, Ginny observed, was probably in his early to mid-thirties. His hair was a rich brown color, not at all thinning from the front, and trimmed short. He had almond shaped eyes and a strong jawline. Overall, Ginny would consider him good looking, but not necessarily "mega-hunkish." He was trim, but not overly muscled, which didn't lend to the usual romance hero. *No*, Ginny decided, *he probably isn't who I'm here to "fall in love with."*

"Please allow me to introduce my wife," new dad turned so Lord Whitmore could kiss her hand.

"It is a pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Hamilton."

"The pleasure is entirely mine, my lord." New mom looked like she just might burst. Ginny felt herself smiling over the thought, as she

couldn't quite understand the excitement. He wasn't a rock star after all.

"And of course, our daughter, Bethany," new dad beamed with pride.

Lord Whitmore turned his attention toward Ginny. His eyes, she could now see, were an incredible shade of green. Bright and vibrant, reminding her of Scotland, the thought of which made her a little sad. "It is a great pleasure to meet you as well, Miss Hamilton."

"You have a beautiful home, Lord Whitmore. I look forward to seeing the rest of it," Ginny stated, not lying. She was really looking forward to seeing more of this house/mansion. "I've heard the gardens are especially lovely this time of year." Ginny heard the words leaving her mouth, but didn't know where they came from. Perhaps a bit of Bethany was popping out.

"Thank you. I am rather fond of my gardens. Perhaps you will permit me to escort you later," he smiled as he took her hand and brushed a light kiss on the backs of her fingers. "Now, please allow my housekeeper to show you to your rooms. I'm sure you are tired after such a long journey." Whitmore turned toward a small, round woman.

"Thank you, my lord. We are most appreciative," her new father said as he took his wife's arm.

"I have a cold luncheon waiting in the dining room when you are refreshed," Whitmore said hospitably.

As he walked away, Ginny noticed his butt. Raising an eyebrow, she thought it looked pretty nice in his tight fitting pants. As a matter of fact, she rather liked the whole outfit, with the coat and boots. She just might like this time period after all.

The housekeeper wasted no time showing them to their rooms. Ginny had her own room, on the second floor with a window facing the infamous gardens. As she looked out her window, she was in awe. They really were beautiful. The housekeeper noticed her attention and said, "Lord Whitmore is famous for his gardens you know. He employs twenty gardeners to maintain it."

"I can tell. They look outstanding. I'm happy to have a room with a view of them."

"Your maid arrived before you and has everything put away. Do you wish me to call her up?" the housekeeper asked. The woman was a bundle of energy, not able to stop moving for even a moment.

Her face was round and her eyes were kind. The housekeeper's body was robust, with large bosoms that bobbed with her every movement.

"Thank you," was all Ginny said, wondering what her maid would do to her.

"Very good, miss," the housekeeper said as she flitted from the room. For the first time since popping into another life, Ginny was alone. She wondered if she would remember some details of her new life before having to play the part. She also wondered if she would ever see her real home again.

"I have ordered a bath for you, miss," her maid said after entering her room. Ginny had spent the solitary five minutes examining the room. It was decorated very tastefully, with simple, purposeful furniture. Besides the bed, which was a grand four poster type, she had a wardrobe, a vanity and a writing desk. The desk was set up next to the second of her two windows, so the correspondent could have the garden as an inspiration.

The hearth was flanked by two over stuffed armchairs cushioned in a dark red, flowery brocade. The same pattern was used on the curtains and bedspread. The floor was covered in large Persian rugs, well made and cushiony, with colors to complement the reds in the fabrics and the soft yellow wallpaper. All in all, the room was the picture of its time period.

"If you will sit, I will remove the pins from your hair," the little maid said, ushering her to the vanity. Without question, Ginny sat down in the chair provided and for the first time, looked at her new person in the mirror.

She already knew she was a tall woman, which would be easier to get used to since Ginny was tall in her real life. What she was not prepared for was her looks. Ginny was greeted by russet colored hair, with natural blond highlights that made it almost glow in the sunlight coming in from the windows. Her face was long, but thin, with big, blue eyes and nearly perfect white teeth. Her face was completed by high cheekbones and a pert nose. Although not supermodel gorgeous, she was quite pretty. The eyes on this face spoke of intelligence, not frivolity. Her lips were full and pouty and looked perfect for flirting, which was a good thing considering her need to find a husband.

The maid must have noticed her staring at herself, because she asked, "Are you alright, miss?"

Ginny turned her eyes toward the maid in the mirror. Was she?

After spending a few months "roughing it" in the wilds of medieval Scotland, she was now in a place where there would be more creature comforts. She still had nothing of her previous life, nothing of the little things she took for granted: no bathroom with running water, no TV with DVR and DVD. Although she knew she could live without those things, she wouldn't mind having her car and a grocery store full of chocolate bars again.

"I don't really feel myself today," she said tentatively. She would gladly give up those comforts of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to have a little more information about the body she possessed. It was scary not knowing what was going on. It made one feel as if they would be caught at any moment, called a liar or impostor, and thrown out.

"A bath will set you to rights." As the words hung in the air, there was a knock at the door. Two footmen brought in a large tin tub, followed closely by maids with buckets of steaming water. Once set up, Ginny's maid, rather Bethany's maid, assisted her in undressing. Once sitting in the tub, Ginny could feel all her worries melting away.

The maid washed her hair, then went about cleaning up the room. Ginny stared at the hearth, now empty, and thought about Ian. Had she fallen in love with him? Her medieval mega-hunk had truly gotten under her skin, in good and bad ways, but she didn't feel any intense loss. The sex was great and his company on most occasions was welcome, but it was more like losing a boyfriend, than a soul mate. Of course, Ginny had never lost a soul mate, so she could be wrong. Since she didn't feel like locking herself away and crying, she figured she was right.

Did she get it wrong? Was it because she hadn't fallen in love, like the romance novels all dictated, that she was stuck living another novel? Maybe she had to do things right this time. Not change the story, like she had with Ian. Follow all the plot lines of this novel to get her ticket home. Well, there was no way of knowing for sure, but at least it was a course of action Ginny could follow.

The maid excused herself to get a new bucket of warm rinse water. Ginny was alone to examine her new body. She was pleasantly skinny, not all bones, but filled out in curves. She finally had the flat

stomach she'd always longed for in her own body. Her breasts were round and perky. Altogether, she figured any man would be pleased with her. Feeling down her stomach, she imagined the baby she was pregnant with before she left Ian and Scotland. Although Ginny wasn't saddened at not having to give birth without a real doctor, hospital and epidural, she felt a twinge of regret. It felt more like a disappointment than a true loss.

As she stared at her big feet, Ginny was jolted upright suddenly. The memories came back in a flash, all at once that her mind was having some difficulty processing all the information. Just as she thought she would pass out from the overload, Ginny laid gently back against the tub, still breathing rapidly, but at least no longer in fear of losing her sanity.

It was all there. She was Bethany Hamilton, daughter of William and Eugenia Hamilton. Her father was the third son of the Earl of Wexton, a position now held by her uncle. Although her father had never taken a profession, in the church or the military, they lived comfortably on an inheritance her father received from an uncle and her mother's sizable dowry. Her mother was the daughter of a baroncy, a family that she seldom saw or corresponded with. Although neither were in any fear of gaining title, Bethany was still considered a good catch due to a sizable dowry of her own.

Her maid returned with a large pitcher of warm water to rinse her off. Before she knew it, Ginny was out of the tub, dried off and sitting at her vanity having her hair combed. At least now, she knew her own maid's name.

"Tabby, have you heard anything about the rest of the party in attendance?" Ginny had to really think about how she said things, not wanting to give herself away.

"Lord Clarendon is among the guests. He has quite the reputation, he does."

"My mother said the same thing. Reputation for what, exactly?"

"A rake, he is, miss. It is said he has slept with most of the married women of the *ton*. Now he needs a wife to produce a 'legitimate' heir to his title."

"Oh," Ginny finally got it. He was a man whore and probably would continue to be such after he was married. Some of the books

she read were coming back to her. The rake, libertine, lecher would be reformed by meeting the perfect woman. A woman of such heights that he would be soured to any other woman's attentions. *Yeah, right.*

So, was this Lord Clarendon to be her mega-hunk? Ginny figured she would meet just about everyone during dinner that evening. Just then, at the thought of food, her stomach gurgled noisily. For Ginny, eating was never a problem.

“Oh my, miss. You haven't eaten all day, have you? I will run downstairs and get you a tray. That way, we will have plenty of time to get you ready for dinner.” With that, Tabby the maid was gone. And Ginny was left wondering why it would take so damn long to get ready for dinner.