

THE GREAT EXHIBITION SERIES

A Historical Romance Series Proposal

by Kaye Dacus

England, 1851.

Prince Albert's Great Exhibition provides the backdrop for a new series of stand-alone, light-hearted historical romances.

Genre: Historical (Early Victorian) Inspirational Romance

Target Market: Women, ages 25+, interested in reading sweet historical romance with light inspirational elements.

Book 1: *Follow the Heart**: An American woman is sent to England to marry wealth, but finds herself torn between the poor man she loves and the viscount who offers the wealth and stability that can save her family.

Book 2: *An Honest Heart**: A physician with a secret past falls in love with the daughter of one of his patients. He must choose between revealing his past and risk losing everything or keeping his secret and watching her marry another man.

Book 3: *The Heart That Waits**: Stephen Brightwell, Viscount Thynne, wants to be loved for himself, not his money or title. Mercy Timperleigh has never married because of the shame of her family's past. When the aristocrat and the schoolmistress fall in love, is it a love that has been worth waiting for?

**Working Titles*

Competitive Titles:

- Tales of London series by Lawana Blackwell (Bethany House)
- The Gresham Chronicles by Lawana Blackwell (Bethany House)
- The Winslow Breed series by Gilbert Morris (Howard Books)
- Lady Trent Mystery series by Gilbert Morris (Thomas Nelson)
- *The Lady of Milkweed Manor*, *The Apothecary's Daughter*, and *The Silent Governess* by Julie Klassen (Bethany House)
- The Miss Pickworth series by Catherine Palmer (Tyndale House)
- *Before the Season Ends*, *The House in Grosvenor Square*, and *A Country House Courtship* by Linore Rose Burkard (Harvest House)
- The English Garden series by Lori Wick (Harvest House)
- *A Man Most Worthy* by Ruth Axtell Morren (Love Inspired Historical)

Historical Research: Kaye Dacus has a Bachelor of Arts in English, with a minor in history, and a Master of Arts in Writing Popular Fiction. Her love of the British literature and history started with Jane Austen. Her undergraduate literary thesis was entitled “Wealth and Social Status as a Theme in *Pride and Prejudice*,” and much of her final semester of undergraduate school was spent studying Austen’s novels, which led her in turn to studying the works of Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell, two of the most beloved authors of early Victorian literature. Her minor in history has given her a love—a thirst—for conducting in-depth, accurate research from original source materials as well as historical, academic, and literary criticism sources.

The Series: The Great Exhibition series builds upon the brand Kaye has developed with her contemporary series (The Brides of Bonneterre, and the Matchmakers series with Barbour Publishing) for creating light-hearted, stand-alone novels which are tied together with recurring characters. It will also build upon the brand she has created with her historical series (The Ransome Trilogy with Harvest House Publishers) as an author who fully immerses her reader in the language, fashion, and details of the historical era. And each book fulfills Kaye’s promise of “Humor, Hope, and Happily Ever Afters” that her readers have come to expect.

The Big Idea: The Great Exhibition series takes a single event from history, Prince Albert’s Great Exhibition of 1851, and uses it to create a historical setting that is at once unique and familiar. Readers of Regency romances will identify with the “sitting-room romance” aspect of the novels—the rules and regulations of society must be observed!—and lovers of Victorian and non-Regency historicals will identify with the era’s move into the Industrial Age, including train travel, steam engines, and new inventions like the telegraph and the daguerreotype arriving on the scene.

Though the books are connected through the historical significance of the Great Exhibition, the setting of each book in and around Oxford, and recurring characters—encouraging readers to read the whole series—each is a stand-alone story, enabling readers to read the series in any order.

With the rise of the steam punk movement (focusing on more fantastical elements of the Victorian age) as well as the popularity of the movies *The Young Victoria* and *Sherlock Holmes*, along with miniseries such as *Cranford*, *North & South*, and *Wives & Daughters* (based on Elizabeth Gaskell’s novels), *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit* (based on Dickens’s novels), and the BBC TV series *Lark Rise to Candleford*, The Great Exhibition series will begin to feed the hunger for Victorian settings in Christian fiction.

BOOK 1: FOLLOW THE HEART (Working Title)

After her father lost most of the family money in a railroad speculation, American-born **MARGARET (MEG) DEARING** and her younger brother **CHRISTOPHER** were sent to their cousin, Sir Robert Buchanan, in England to find wealthy spouses. Christopher, who recently finished his law degree at Yale, is interested in science and technology, and since he's been reading all he can about Prince Albert's Great Exhibition, he's more than willing to go. Though she did not want to leave Philadelphia, Meg did want to escape the humiliation of all her wealthy friends looking down on her now that she cannot afford anything.

Originally an under-gardener at Chatsworth in Devonshire, **ANDREW LAWTON** came to the attention of Joseph Paxton with his garden designs and drawings of buildings. He apprenticed with Paxton, even attending him as he designed and oversaw the building of the Crystal Palace for the Great Exhibition. Through one of the other men on the committee, Andrew learned of Sir Robert Buchanan's desire for a redesign of his gardens and outbuildings at his country home near Oxford, Wakesdown Manor, as well as at his estate in London. Andrew asked if he could send a proposal, and Paxton agreed. To his great surprise, Sir Robert chose Andrew's design and hired him to spend six months at his estate overseeing the refurbishment of his grounds.

Though accustomed to moving in the highest echelons of society in Philadelphia, Meg finds high society in England much different than what she expected and seeks refuge outdoors. At their country home, outside of Philadelphia, Meg always enjoyed gardening—flowers, fruits and vegetables, ornamental plants—it was where she felt closest to God. But in Sir Robert's elaborate gardens, she cannot find the peace she seeks. Kneeling to replant a scruffy shrub that has fallen over, she is approached by a gardener and asked what she is doing. She explains that the rough, wild-looking shrub adds character and charm to the garden, and she did not want to see it die.

When Andrew hears the pretty houseguest's explanation for why she replanted the blight of a shrub he just pulled out of the ground, it is all he can do not to laugh at her provincial view of the beauty of the outdoors. He tries to explain that it is through control of nature that true beauty is achieved, but this seems only to offend her.

Christopher enjoys spending time with Andrew, learning all he can about the latest engineering methods used to construct the Crystal Palace. Sir Robert, indulging Christopher's interest in science and technology—knowing those can only help him build a future not based on speculations and wild gambles in the stock market that his father has made—encourages Christopher to travel to London with Andrew on occasion to meet with Paxton and the other engineers on the project.

Christopher has also developed an interest in the Buchanans' governess, **HONORA (NORA) WOODRIFF**, a woman of great intelligence and accomplishments but no wealth—unlike Sir Robert's two eligible, older daughters, Edith and Dorcas, both with large fortunes to be inherited upon their marriages.

Nora took the posting of governess in the Buchanan home two years ago, before Dorcas left for finishing school. Because of her youth and beauty, rumors started in the community that she

might have taken the job of governess, but it was the position of Lady Buchanan she wanted. Edith and Dorcas initially believed these rumors as well and made life at Wakesdown Manor as miserable as possible for Nora. Nora confined herself to her rooms and limited her contact with Sir Robert. Now, at twenty-eight years old with her youngest charge preparing to go off to finishing school in less than six months, Nora has resigned herself to the fact she's too old to marry, so she's looking for another situation to go to when Florie leaves home. Though she discourages Meg's overtures of friendship, she is drawn to the American—Meg is only two years younger, and they have similar ideas about education for women and universal suffrage.

Meg wonders if Mr. Lawton's attitude about controlling nature extends to his ideas about women—that they, too, must be strictly controlled. She finds herself spending more time outside, “accidentally” running into Mr. Lawton and taking pleasure in baiting him about his stodgy ideals, especially as concerns education and rights for women. Even quoting scriptures about how all are equal in God's sight doesn't move him.

Andrew allows Miss Dearing to believe his reaction to her revelation of her radical beliefs is because he is old-fashioned and set in his ways. Secretly, he agrees with her that God loves all people, men and women, equally. But though Andrew finds himself attracted to Miss Dearing, marrying someone so outspoken about her social beliefs could ruin his career before it is fully launched. Besides, if he marries at all, it must be for money—because he will not be able to support a wife and family for many years. And he is in on the family secret—the Dearings are poor relations sent to marry money.

Meg figures out she has taken her teasing too far when Andrew begins avoiding her. Though she desperately wants to make amends and show him that she isn't the radical she's pretended to be in her effort to tease him, she also realizes that her father would never approve of a near-penniless architect as a husband for her. So she tries to push her feelings for him aside.

Her prospects, though not her mood, brighten when a friend of Sir Robert's, Lord Stephen Brightwell, a wealthy viscount, shows favorable interest in her. Though Lord Brightwell is fifteen years her senior, he has the wealth, social status, and stability she knows will save her family. Warned by her family repeatedly, Meg keeps the truth about her family's lost wealth and status from Lord Brightwell—along with her thoughts and opinions on everything.

Though he has distanced himself from Meg, when Andrew sees her receiving Lord Brightwell's attentions, he is torn between his attraction for her and his dream for his career as an architect. He doesn't see how he can have both, so he doesn't even bother praying for both. But when a rainstorm catches them both unawares—and traps them at the old chapel he is measuring for restoration—their pushed-aside feelings rise to the surface and result in a passionate kiss.

Andrew apologizes and explains why they cannot be together. Meg tries to convince him they could make it work—that she would be more than happy to work side-by-side with him to make him successful, that she trusts God would help them. But Andrew refuses to subject her to a hard life—a life of deprivation, hardship, and constant upheaval, the way he grew up. His mother always told him that God would provide—even when sitting in the workhouse, lungs rattling with pneumonia weeks before her death. He admits he knows Meg's family has no money, and

no matter how much he loves her, he cannot ask her to give up the prospect of finding security by marrying someone wealthy, because he must do the same. Heartbroken, Meg accuses Andrew of not knowing what love really means and runs from the chapel.

Through Mr. Paxton, Christopher is offered a position as a lawyer with a railroad company that is looking to expand into America. It means staying in England only for a few more months—it also means he now has his own source of income and is not dependent on marrying for money. With Nora's position at Wakesdown ending on Florie's fifteenth birthday, Christopher asks Nora to marry him. She agrees and they marry in a small ceremony in the garden at Wakesdown the week before Christopher is to start his new job.

With Christopher married to someone with no money and all of her other siblings too young for marriage, the crushing weight of saving her family falls on Meg. She now has no choice but to marry for money to keep her parents and younger siblings from losing everything.

Andrew is requested by his mentor to be present for the grand opening of the Crystal Palace he helped design/build and, unable to watch Meg marry someone else, he receives permission from Sir Robert and leaves for London. Meg is devastated when she learns Andrew has left—and without saying goodbye.

Having set her own sights on Lord Brightwell, and jealous over the attentions the viscount is paying Meg, Edith Buchanan reveals to Lord Brightwell that she saw Meg and Andrew kissing in the chapel ruins. Lord Brightwell asks Meg about it. She convinces him, and tries to convince herself, that it meant nothing, that Andrew meant nothing to her. When Lord Brightwell proposes, she accepts, though she knows her heart will always belong to Andrew.

At family dinner, when Lord Brightwell announces that Meg has agreed to become his wife, Meg cannot take the guilt any longer—she stops him in the middle of his toast and admits that she isn't in love with him, that she loves someone else. She releases Lord Brightwell from their engagement. She spends that night packing and accepts Sir Robert's offer of a carriage to London and money for passage back to Philadelphia. In London, she stays with Christopher and Nora in the flat provided them by the railroad company. Because Christopher and Andrew are still friends, Andrew got several passes for the opening week of the Exhibition for Christopher. Not wanting to leave Meg alone in the flat, moping, Christopher insists she accompany them to the Exhibition.

Several times during the opening day, Andrew hears whispers through the crowd about Lord Brightwell and his fiancée. Each time, he changes direction to keep from having to see Meg on the arm of her future husband. Andrew regrets his decision—he should have married Meg, poor or not. He should have followed his heart and trusted God to provide for their needs.

Meg isn't certain why Christopher insisted she come if he's just going to drag her around without letting her stop to see any of the exhibits. After overhearing several people talking about how Lord Stephen Brightwell has been jilted by an American upstart, Meg finally breaks free and escapes outside to the park, losing herself in its grandeur and, for the first time since arriving in England, feeling God's presence assuring her all will be well.

Rounding a corner in a path secluded by tall shrubs, she finds herself face to face with Andrew. After awkward greetings, Andrew congratulates Meg on her engagement, wishing her joy. Meg begins to explain what happened, but as soon as she gets her first words out—that she is no longer engaged to Lord Brightwell—Andrew stops her with a kiss, followed by an apology for behaving like an idiot, followed by asking her to marry him.

Certain marrying Andrew is why God brought her to England, Meg accepts his proposal, though she knows it will mean continued hardship for her own family. After a long walk through the garden, they return to the exhibition hall to find Christopher and tell him their news.

Christopher, who has been in a panic trying to find Meg, reveals that he had been trying to find Andrew so he and Meg could be reunited, knowing how they each felt about the other. He then pulls a letter out of his pocket and hands it to Meg, explaining that it arrived two days ago, but he wanted her to see Andrew again before reading it. It is a letter from their parents—the railroad scheme turned out not to be a bust, as the company for which Christopher now works has bought out the partners who originally spent the company into bankruptcy with no clear business plan. The family is well on the way to financial recovery, and they give Christopher and Meg their blessing to marry whomever they wish. They also include that if Christopher's friend Andrew would come to Philadelphia, he could make his fortune, as everyone in society wants a true English garden. With Christopher now prepared to take over the company's interests in Philadelphia, he and Nora travel back to America with Andrew and Meg.

Epilogue: Meg and Andrew are married in her garden at her parents' house in Philadelphia.

BOOK 2—AN HONEST HEART (Working Title)

When **NEAL STRADBROKE**'s father, a surveyor, discovered gold on his claim in Mayday Hills, Australia, in 1825, he determined his son would not be forced to grow up in the hardscrabble world of speculators, land-hungry immigrants, and convicts. The government, however, made Stradbroke keep quiet about his find because they did not want the population to hear about it. The year Neal turned twelve, his mother died of typhoid. Because his father had not been able to do anything about the gold on his land, he and Neal dug up what they could, sewed it into the hems and pockets of Neal's clothes, and Neal was sent off to England to live with his grandmother in Oxford and go to school. His grandmother, living on a meager income, helped Neal get the gold to an assayer, and they took home a small fortune. Accustomed to living on a strict budget, Neal's grandmother continued in this way, leading everyone in their community to believe Neal was living off her.

CADENCE "CADDY" BAINBRIDGE is the child of a country curate whose parents scrimped and saved so they could send Caddy to school where she would meet wealthier young ladies who could be helpful to her in her future. To help earn her tuition money, she mended the other girls' clothes and even began making frocks for the wealthier girls. Her father died during her last year of school, and when she finished, her mother insisted Caddy use what little money remained to start a business. Because of all her former school connections, Caddy's dress shop in Oxford has

been very successful. But then her mother fell ill, and with her two younger brothers off seeking their fortune in California, most of Caddy's earnings now go for doctors, medicines, and trips to the seaside trying to get her mother better.

OLIVER CARMICHAEL is the son of local gentry. He's always drawn the eye of all the girls with no exertion on his part—all the girls, that is, except seamstress Caddy Bainbridge. So, even though he has plans to marry **EDITH BUCHANAN**, a baronet's daughter, he places a bet with his friends that he can make Caddy fall in love with him before the opening day of the Great Exhibition.

Caddy's mother has gone out for a walk with her companion when Oliver Carmichael comes by the shop with his mother to order a gown. Oliver is very flattering and attentive toward Caddy—she's always thought him attractive, but she knows her place and has never thought he knew she existed.

The end of the consultation is interrupted when a young man bursts in carrying her mother, who collapsed while out on her walk. Oliver tells Caddy to call on him if she needs anything before he and his mother leave. The young man who brought her mother home happens to be a doctor who also teaches at the medical college at Oxford.

When Neal asks Caddy about her mother's treatment, he is disturbed to hear about the archaic methods used for treating the woman's illness. He suggests she take her mother to see the senior doctor with whom he works, but she tells him she's happy with the doctors they've already seen. When he persists, she admits she can't afford any more doctors. When she insists on paying him for assisting her mother, he tells her he will take it in trade—he has several garments that need mending.

Even though Mrs. Bainbridge does not want to see another doctor, she's charmed by Neal, a young man who is somewhat mysterious about his past and how he came to live in Oxford. Caddy thinks he is too quiet and reserved—besides, she knows that most doctors, like most curates, spend too much time away from their families working, and she doesn't want to set herself up to fall in love with someone who could hurt her like that. So she tries to put Neal out of her mind.

Edith Buchanan has been disappointed in marriage prospects already, when a wealthy viscount first chose her American cousin over her, and then, when things did not work out with the cousin, he did not turn his attentions onto Edith. So she is not about to lose another suitor—wealthy, even if he isn't titled—to another woman of lower social status. Rumor around Oxford is that Oliver is paying an unusual amount of attention to the seamstress, so Edith starts her own rumors about the quality of Caddy's work and her reputation.

Knowing the rumors could ruin her business, Caddy informs Oliver that though she has been grateful for his attentions, he must stop visiting her shop, as she does not wish any taint to come upon his reputation.

Neal continues to find excuses to visit Caddy's shop—so that he can check in on her mother—even to the point of rounding up mending work from other doctors and students at the college so that Caddy will not be able to make him stop coming. He can see how hurt Caddy is by the vicious rumors being spread around town about her, and though he is impressed by the way she handles it (having overheard what she told Oliver), he is concerned that she has no one to talk to, no one to turn to for help and comfort, since she refuses to let her mother know about it.

When Neal confronts Caddy about keeping secrets from her mother, Caddy confronts him about keeping secrets as well. She's heard enough gossip to know he has a past he keeps hidden. Neal swore to his father that he would never tell anyone where he came from, as his father did not want the taint of being born in a territory still widely regarded as nothing more than a penal colony to ruin Neal's chances for a good life in England. He wants to be honest with Caddy, believes he can trust her, but he cannot break his word to his father.

Caddy is hurt when Neal won't tell her about his past—she had begun to like him. Things are strained between them, and this is complicated when Oliver continues to find ways to see her.

Flowers begin arriving at the shop bearing cards quoting romantic poetry, but not signed. Because she knows Oliver's family has a hothouse nursery at their estate on the edge of town, she assumes the flowers are from him.

Neal knows the flowers are from Oliver, and he wonders at the reason why. Oliver's mother—a patient of the senior doctor Neal assists—informed them on one of their many calls to treat her for imaginary ailments that Oliver's betrothal to the wealthy daughter of a baronet was almost finalized. He wants to protect Caddy, but when he tries to broach the subject of Oliver with her, she informs him it is none of his concern.

One afternoon, when Neal has come to check on her mother, Caddy is surprised by the entrance of a couple of men into her shop. They speak with strange accents when they tell her they were informed that Dr. Neal Stradbroke was known to be at the shop and they needed to see him. Caddy retrieves him from the parlor—not wanting these strange, rough-looking men to upset her mother, whose health has become increasingly fragile.

From the look on Neal's face when he sees the strangers, Caddy can tell he recognizes them and that they aren't welcome visitors. He leaves with them, giving Caddy no explanation as to who they are or what they want with him.

The next day, after another anonymous bouquet of flowers arrives, Neal comes by to see Mrs. Bainbridge. On his way out, he tells Caddy he must go to London for several days. When she asks him if it has something to do with the men who came by, he tells her it does, but that he cannot say anything more about it.

When Caddy goes out to the Carmichael estate to fit Mrs. Carmichael's gown for the Great Exhibition opening, Oliver is there and invites Caddy to take a turn about the gardens with him when she is finished. Oliver is concerned about the amount of time Neal spends at Caddy's place, and needs to win his bet—as the stakes are high and Oliver cannot cover the amount

without asking his father for money. So he tells Caddy that he's heard rumors about Neal and the men who came to see him—that the men are money lenders known for lending money to only the most notorious gamblers, so therefore Neal must be a gambler so far in debt that he has had to go to London to do something underhanded for these men as a way of paying his debt to them.

Caddy cannot believe Neal would be a gambler—he seemed such an upstanding, godly young man. Though, he does seem to have much more money than a young doctor ought, and no one in Oxford seems to know how he came to have it. She has no reason not to trust Oliver; he knows more about these things than she.

When Neal returns from London, he comes by to check on Mrs. Bainbridge—and refuses to tell Caddy anything he did in London, which, to her, only confirms Oliver's explanation. The pain this brings her makes her realize that, despite her determination not to fall in love with someone in such a consuming profession, she's done just that.

Over the next couple of months, Neal continues to make these mysterious trips to London while Oliver continues finding ways to see Caddy. Her business has increased with customers wanting new gowns for the grand opening of the Great Exhibition. The more people start talking about it, the more she wants to go—what better place for a seamstress to see the height of fashion but at an event attended by the cream of English, and foreign, society? But she cannot justify the expense, not when she has her mother to support and mounting doctors' bills to pay now that she's refused to let Neal treat her mother any longer. But late at night, straining her eyes by candlelight, she secretly makes a dress for herself, just in case a miracle happens and she is able to go.

Neal cannot stand the suspicion with which Caddy looks at him when she tells him he is no longer welcome in her shop/home. He wishes he could tell her why he's been making the trips to London, but to do so would be to break his word to his father.

Heartsick over Neal's unwillingness to tell her the truth, Caddy turns to Oliver for comfort. Even though she does not love him, she believes he will propose to her one day soon, and she plans to accept.

Caddy visits the Carmichael estate to fit another gown for Mrs. Carmichael, and is subjected to listening to Mrs. Carmichael rave about the grand opening of the Exhibition, of what everyone was wearing, and of the fabric goods from all over the world she saw there. Oliver insists on seeing Caddy home, who has begun to believe that unless she marries someone like Oliver, her life will continue in the same dreary path it is now on. At her doorstep, he kisses her and asks her if she loves him. Believing he is going to propose to her, she lies to him and tells him she loves him.

Unbeknownst to Caddy, the kiss is seen by others: Oliver's friends. The bet now won, Oliver can drop the pretense of courting Caddy and get on with the necessary courting of his betrothed. Edith tries to send him away—because of how he's embarrassed her with his public attentions to Caddy. Now that he's won his bet and is flush with his winnings, Oliver tells Edith everything. Edith forgives him—conditionally. She's still angry—at Caddy for drawing Oliver's attentions

away from her and making her the subject of rumors around town. Edith hatches an idea to get back at Caddy and put the seamstress in her place.

A ticket to the Grand Exhibition, along with a train ticket, arrives at the shop with a note from Oliver asking Caddy to meet him there. Though she'd rather see the Exhibition with Neal—who has been gone from Oxford for several weeks now, since just before the grand opening—she is thrilled that she's going to get to go no matter whose arm she sees it from. She has decided, though, that even if Oliver does propose, she will not accept. Even though he could provide financial security for her and her mother, she knows she would be unhappy married to someone like Oliver—someone who has said and done things that have proven he isn't the kind of man she wants to spend the rest of her life with.

With her mother and her companion off at Brighton enjoying the benefits of the seaside, Caddy boards the train early one July morning for the trip into London. She is surprised when Oliver does not meet her at the train station in London, but she manages to find her way to the Crystal Palace. For a while, she forgets all about Oliver in the wonderment of the displays around her—until she spots him not too far away. She is about to call out to him when she realizes there is a young woman on his arm—Miss Edith Buchanan, the young woman who tried as hard as she could to ruin Caddy. Never one to be squeamish, she approaches to greet them.

When Oliver introduces Edith as his fiancée, Caddy hides her shock as best she can—but from the amused look on the faces of several of Oliver's friends, she knows she did not do a good job of it. Realizing she'd fooled herself, by believing she'd ever be more than sport to someone of Oliver's rank, she congratulates them and excuses herself with as much dignity as she can muster and wends her way through the exhibition hall, not paying attention to where she's going.

She ends up in the Colonies exhibits area. The exhibits from India are packed with gawkers, so she goes to where the crowds seem to be thinning—Australia. She's just stepped into the area when she sees two familiar looking men: the two men who came to her shop looking for Neal.

The two men greet her and tell her if she's looking for Neal, he is over at the raw materials display with his father and the rest of the Australian delegation.

Caddy makes her way over and stands at the back of a small group as an older man talks about surveying the land and the gold that has been discovered recently in several areas of the colony. The disbelieving crowd disperses—leaving Caddy standing there. Neal breaks away from the officials and comes to her, drawing her away.

He explains everything—about his childhood in Australia, about his father finding gold twenty-six years earlier and sending Neal to Oxford to be educated, about his father's insistence Neal tell no one of his background, about the Australian delegation choosing to put together a committee for the Exhibition comprised of Australians already living in England—that the men who came to get him knew his father and had known Neal's whereabouts all along.

Caddy tells him that knowing his background would not have made her think less of him, but that she forgives him because he proved he was a man of quality by keeping his word to his

father—to whom he introduces Caddy (the man who was speaking to the group). Caddy tells Neal about Oliver and Edith and their plan to embarrass Caddy, and asks Neal to forgive her for believing anything Oliver told her about him. He asks her about the kiss he saw, and she admits she allowed Oliver to take the liberty because she was hurt by Neal's keeping secrets from her and thought Oliver would propose. But she is careful to let Neal know for certain that she does not love Oliver.

Neal asks her if she thinks she might someday be able to love him. She admits she's loved him since the first day he walked into her shop, carrying her mother. Neal kisses her and proposes. She accepts, generating cheers from everyone looking on.

Epilogue: Caddy and Neal are married in the country church where her father was curate.

BOOK 3—THE HEART THAT WAITS (Working Title)

BENEDICT NORTON-CONYERS left his position as a tutor to an earl's sons in Northern England on the promise of a position as a schoolmaster of a prominent school in London. But when he arrived, the school had closed and Benedict was left with no job and no prospects—until he read about the need for guides at Prince Albert's Great Exhibition. While it is a temporary position—lasting only until the Exhibition closes in October—Benedict loves the opportunities to both teach and learn the Exhibition provides, along with the opportunity to meet people who might help him secure another permanent position.

PHILIPPA GOODWIN would be at the Exhibition every day if she could afford it—and if she were not employed as a teacher at Miss Timperleigh's Seminary for Young Ladies, the school at which she was a student up until five years ago. But Pippa has been able to take her students to the Exhibition several times. And while the displays of unique products, tools, and machines from all around the world are interesting, what makes her want to spend even more time at the Crystal Palace is the presence of a handsome young guide, Mr. Norton-Conyers.

Growing up, **MERCY TIMPERLEIGH** enjoyed all the benefits wealth could bring an only child. But when her father died shortly before her eighteenth birthday, she discovered that her privileged life included being sheltered from the truth about the origin of her family's wealth—a fortune gained through her grandfather's and great-grandfather's success in the transatlantic slave trade in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Ashamed at being the sole heiress of such a legacy, Mercy decided to put the money to use in such a way as to bless those less fortunate. So she opened Miss Timperleigh's Seminary for Young Ladies, a school for promising young women who would not otherwise be able to afford a quality education.

After a brief engagement to a woman he admired but did not love, **LORD STEPHEN BRIGHTWELL**, Viscount Thynne, is determined he will find a woman he can both love and respect—who loves and respects him in return, not one who wants the comfort and social status his title and wealth provide—for they are a burden to him, a reminder of his father's profligate and entitled lifestyle. At forty-two years old, he is not interested in the fortune- and title-seeking debutantes his friends and family keep putting in his path. Now, having spent a few months in London, Stephen is shocked and saddened by the arrival of his young niece, thirteen-year-old

Isabel, and nephew, twelve-year-old Dutton, with the news that Stephen's younger brother and his wife died of cholera in India.

To try to cheer the children up, Stephen takes them to the Great Exhibition. He is impressed by the young man who acts as their guide and asks him if he has ever considered becoming a private tutor, knowing his nephew is far behind where he should be in order to qualify for entry to Eaton in a year. Benedict takes Stephen's job offer and agrees to start in three weeks, after the Exhibition ends October 15. Stephen sees something else of interest at the Exhibition—a lovely woman surrounded by girls who are obviously her students. He observes them for a while and is awed by the woman's ability to engage, educate, and control the young women, when he is having a hard time handling one thirteen-year-old girl. He approaches the woman and learns she is Miss Timperleigh, headmistress of Miss Timperleigh's Seminary for Young Ladies in Oxford.

The petulant young woman had caught Mercy's eye, so when her uncle approached her about enrolling his niece in her school, Mercy knows she can help. She assumes from the man's dress and demeanor he's wealthy, if not titled, but he introduces himself only as "Stephen Brightwell," and, even after learning her school is for daughters of merchants and farmers, he asks if there is a place open for Isabel. So Mercy sets aside her assumption that he would snub her and her school at learning the background of the girls it's meant for and sets a time for him to bring his niece by the school for an in-depth interview.

Stephen did not mean to mislead the schoolmistress, but something inside of him wanted Miss Timperleigh to see him as a man—not as a viscount. With a tutor for Dutton hired and a possible place at a school for Isabel set, Stephen packs them up and returns to his estate outside of Oxford.

Upon returning to Oxford to get the girls settled back in to school for the Michaelmas term, Mercy mentions her run-in with a Mr. Brightwell to her good friend, Caddy Stradbroke. Caddy asks Mercy if she means *Lord* Brightwell, Viscount Thynne. When Caddy describes what the viscount looks like, Mercy realizes it is the same man she met at the Exhibition. At first, she is angry over the deception and considers refusing to admit his niece to her school. But when "Mr." Brightwell and Isabel arrive at the school the next day and Mercy sees the wistful look in Isabel's eyes as she stands outside a classroom door looking in on the group inside the room, Mercy realizes she cannot let her own personal prejudice against people of wealth and entitlement get in the way of reaching out to this hurting, grieving young woman. And, though her own inheritance is far from being depleted, even with as much as running the school costs, Mercy is not at all ashamed of asking Mr. Brightwell to pay tuition in an amount that would rival one of the best finishing schools for daughters of the aristocracy in London.

Stephen cannot imagine that anyone else whose daughter attends Miss Timperleigh's school can afford such a high tuition cost, but having seen first-hand the quality of education and facilities Miss Timperleigh's institution offers its pupils, he agrees to pay it, assuming the school needs all the funds it can get. He is also surprised that Miss Timperleigh has not learned his true identity, since most people in Oxford seem to know him on sight or recognize his name. But he is only too happy to let the misconception stand as long as it can—because he likes the way Mercy Timperleigh looks at him and treats him as someone on an equal social standing as herself.

Mercy wonders if Lord Brightwell is truly concerned about the education of his niece or if he's wanting to foist her off on someone else so he does not have to think about or come into contact with the temperamental adolescent. But she knows it is important for Isabel to have as much contact as possible with her only remaining family. So when he returns the next day to bring Isabel to move in to the residential school, Mercy asks him if he would be willing to help with the school's Roman Days events, which are to be held the last week of the term before the Christmas holiday. She is somewhat surprised when he readily agrees—and tells her that if she needs the help of his nephew or his nephew's tutor, to let him know.

Isabel's first week of school does not go smoothly—she is disruptive in classes, insults the girls she is rooming with, and refuses to participate in the assigned household chores each girl must perform. Mercy initially decides to let the teachers handle it, but when Isabel throws a bucket of dirty water on Pippa after refusing to help scrub the dining tables, Mercy intervenes and takes Isabel to her office. After enduring the young woman's insults, she is able to get to the core of the problem—Isabel is grieving for her parents and feels abandoned by her uncle. She assures Isabel, she hopes honestly, that her uncle loves her—after all, he agreed to help with the Roman Days. And, unlike when her brother goes off to Eton next year, Isabel will get to see her uncle and brother on Sunday afternoons after church. This seems to appease Isabel, but for the rest of the week, Mercy keeps watch on the young woman to ensure she behaves. She must intervene once more—when two other girls begin to tease Isabel for being behind in Latin and Isabel takes the teasing personally—but when she has Isabel come to her office for tea on Saturday, the girl seems to have calmed down and be settling in better.

Having gotten out of the habit of attending church himself many years ago, when Dutton mentions it, Stephen decides it is a good idea to get back in the habit, for the boy's sake—and they are to pick up Isabel after church anyway. At the cathedral, he sees Mercy in the nave along with her students many of whom are dispersing to sit with their families. In response to his greeting, she addresses him as *Lord Thynne*, and the expression on her face tells him she's known all along who he is. He inquires after Isabel's first week of school. Mercy is cryptic in her response, and Stephen wonders what that means. When Isabel joins them, she acknowledges Stephen with a proper curtsy and formal greeting, but when he offers his arm to escort her to the family pew, she takes a step back—toward Mercy—and asks if she might be permitted to sit with the girls from school who have no family to sit with.

To keep from upsetting Isabel, Mercy agrees to allow her to stay with the rest of the girls during the service. But when Isabel begins to walk out of the church with the school group, Mercy stops her and reminds her she is to spend the afternoon with her uncle and brother. She can see a fear of the unknown hollowing Isabel's eyes, but, after a long hesitation, Isabel takes her uncle's arm. Isabel then asks if Miss Timperleigh might be invited to Thynne Manor for dinner, but before her uncle can respond, Mercy thanks her for the kind thought but tells them she must return to the school to have dinner with the girls whose families live too far away for them to go home on Sunday afternoons so that the rest of the teachers and house mistresses can go home as well.

Stephen wonders if Mercy takes any time away from the school herself, but is left to ponder that question when she leaves to walk with the rest of the students back to the school. Isabel is quiet

and withdrawn on the ride back to Thynne Manor, but Dutton manages to draw her out and get her to talk about her first week at school. Dutton's eyes sparkle with envy when Isabel talks about being surrounded constantly by the other girls and how she cannot have any time alone. Perhaps finding some boys for Dutton to spend time with would be a good idea. After a pleasant afternoon, Stephen and Dutton ride back into Oxford with Isabel to deliver her to school. She hardly takes time to give them a proper farewell at the door before rushing inside. While hurt by his niece's lack of enthusiasm at spending time with him, he is pleased that she seems to like the school so much.

When Benedict arrives in Oxford in mid-October, he is charmed by the town and flabbergasted by the situation in which he finds himself. He expected a nice country home; what he finds is an imposing manor dating back to Elizabethan times. But though the exterior of the structure wears a centuries-old façade, inside it is the home of a thoroughly modern man—indeed, Benedict recognizes several inventions and contraptions he saw, and told others about, at the Exhibition. He quickly discovers Lord Brightwell is a man of many interests, including science and technology, and likes to read and discuss the latest scientific journals, something Benedict has always enjoyed. But though the uncle is learned and well read, the same cannot be said for the nephew. For Dutton to be ready to enter Eton next year, Benedict has his work cut out for him.

On the third Sunday in October, attending church on her day off, Pippa Goodwin is startled upon seeing Benedict Norton-Conyers across the sanctuary. When their eyes meet, she knows he is just as surprised—and pleased—to see her. Afterward, Benedict offers to walk Pippa home. She tells him about her family—her sisters who attend Miss Timperleigh's, her brothers whom she tutors as best she can on Sundays, her day off. Benedict offers his tutoring services, and, though Pippa would like to accept, knows that is a decision her parents must make.

After a hopeful farewell, Pippa tells her parents of Benedict's offer. Having watched the two on the walk home, her mother warns Pippa against allowing herself to develop feelings for the young man, as it is against the rules for teachers to have suitors and she could lose her position. She assures her parents she has no intention of Mr. Norton-Conyers becoming her follower, though secretly wishes she could.

Benedict asks Stephen for permission to use some of Dutton's schoolbooks for tutoring the Goodwin boys, explaining he has offered to tutor the boys on his day off. Seeing an opportunity for Dutton to have some boys to socialize with—and to be taught how to interact with people from all levels of society—Stephen pays a visit to the Goodwin home to see if they would mind if Benedict brings Dutton to their home twice a week to share lessons with their sons—and for Dutton to work with the boys, helping them with all the work they must do around the small dairy farm. For now, Dutton is heir to the title and estates, but if Stephen marries and has his own son, Dutton will have but a small inheritance and his education and skills to live on, so Stephen wants him to be as prepared as possible for whatever life brings his way. And he needs to be around boys his own age. The Greys agree, and not only does Dutton's morale pick up, but he seems to learn better in the company of his new friends.

As autumn draws to a close, Stephen spends more time at Miss Timperleigh's school helping the girls build chariots—figuring out how to fix broken wagon wheels and attach them to old

barrels—for the father-daughter chariot races, build catapults from their own designs, and construct a replica of an aqueduct in the garden. He is pleased to see how well Isabel fits in with the rest of the girls—but concerned at how she, more than any other student, looks to Mercy Timperleigh for approval.

At Stephen's request, Mercy allows Stephen's nephew, his tutor, and Pippa Goodwin's brothers get involved in helping the girls finish their projects for Roman Days. She cannot help but notice the barely suppressed longing between Pippa and Benedict, but knowing that the tutor is employed by Lord Brightwell only until Dutton goes to Eton next September, she does not want to see her favorite former pupil hurt. So she gives Pippa a gentle reminder about the rule that teachers are not to have followers. After Pippa leaves her office, Mercy gives herself a reminder that Lord Stephen Brightwell is not a man who would fall in love with, and especially would not marry, a schoolmistress. Yet her heart still sings at the thought of seeing him the next time he comes to help the girls with their projects.

The week before the Roman Days festival at the school, Stephen's stepmother, the Dowager Lady Brightwell, arrives at Thynne Manor from her villa in Italy—having sent no acknowledgment that she received his letter informing her of her only son's death. She is appalled to learn that Isabel is attending a school for "lower class" girls and that Dutton is being forced to perform manual labor on a farm. She accuses Stephen of oppressing the children because they are the offspring of his *half* brother, and threatens that she will take them back to Italy with her if he does not put Isabel in a proper school in London and cut off all contact between Dutton and the Greys. While he is not concerned that she would be able to take the children away from him, it is when she threatens to cut off Dutton's inheritance and Isabel's dowry—both of which are secured to them through the wealth she brought with her in her marriage to Stephen's father—he realizes he must at least appear to capitulate until she does what she's been doing since his brother was a little boy: disappear back to Italy. He tells himself that the devastation he feels at the idea of pulling Isabel from the school is for Isabel's sake—knowing how much she loves it there—but, being honest with himself, he admits that he's devastated because it means he will have no excuse to spend time with Mercy, the woman to whom his heart now belongs. When Stephen informs Isabel he will have to pull her out of Miss Timperleigh's school until her grandmother leaves, Isabel throws a fit and locks herself in her bedroom.

Shortly before midnight, Isabel's chambermaid enters the study where Stephen is reading to inform him Isabel is not in her room. After a thorough search of the house and grounds, Stephen concludes that Isabel must have run off to go back to the school—in the middle of a heavy snowfall. But when he arrives at the school, Isabel is not there. Mercy knows the fields and farms that lie between the manor house and the school well, so she goes with Stephen to try to find Isabel. Finally, near dawn, they discover her huddled under a tree near the creek that runs along the back of the school grounds. She hovers near death for a week, leading Lady Brightwell to hurl more accusations at Stephen.

When Mercy tries to visit during the Christmas holidays, she is taken to the receiving room and coldly dismissed by Lady Brightwell, who tells her she will never see Isabel—or Stephen—

again. Mercy, who believes Stephen to be a better man than that leaves, knowing as soon as Isabel is well, she will once again be at the school.

But when the spring term begins, Isabel does not come to school. Pippa reports that though Benedict still tutors her brothers on Saturdays, he is no longer taking Dutton there twice during the week to teach the boys and let Dutton work on the farm. The first week that Isabel is at church, she starts toward Mercy, only to be jerked back and reprimanded by Lady Brightwell. The tears that well in Isabel's eyes bring them to Mercy's eyes as well—disappointed in not getting to talk to Isabel and heartbroken by Stephen's tacit approval of the action by not countermanding his stepmother's actions.

As the spring wears on, Benedict and Pippa can no longer fight their feelings for each other and admit to each other their love. But then Benedict is offered an opportunity he cannot refuse—the opportunity to become the headmaster at a new school in Melbourne, Australia. Though Pippa wants nothing more than to marry Benedict, she cannot leave England, and she cannot stop working—her family relies on her teaching salary. When Benedict proposes to Pippa, asking her to marry him in September and then go to Australia with him, she refuses. Back at school that evening, a tearful Pippa tells Mercy everything.

Mercy wishes she could share her own heartbreak with her young protégé, but it would be too embarrassing to reveal her girlish attraction to a man whom she could never have dreamed of marrying. But she does not want Pippa to end up like her—a dried-up old spinster at thirty-six years old, as the matrons of the town like to remind her—so she puts her own heartbreak aside in order to try to come up with a solution for Pippa and Benedict.

With Isabel off at a school in London and a withdrawn, nervous Dutton falling further and further behind in his studies daily, Stephen has come to the end of his tolerance with his stepmother. But when he hints to her, as she complains about the cold English winter one afternoon, that she might prefer to return to Italy, she tells him she will not return until she is certain that he will not put the children right back into the situations in which she found them. Stephen is gearing himself up for the argument he has been hesitant to have with the woman for the three months she's been at Thynne Manor, when they're interrupted by the butler who shows Mercy—and Isabel—into the room. According to Mercy, Isabel managed to get out of the school in London, get to the train station, and take the train to Oxford—and walk from the Oxford station to the school.

When the dowager viscountess begins to shake Isabel and berate her for running away from the finest school in London, Mercy does not wait for Stephen to act—assuming he won't—and pulls the child away from Lady Brightwell, putting herself between them. She informs Lady Brightwell that the young ladies who attend her school are more respectable and better behaved than Lady Brightwell, given the way Mercy has seen her act, and that there is not a school anywhere in the country that is turning out better-educated young women than hers. Lady Brightwell tells Mercy to mind her place and when Isabel steps between them to tell her grandmother not to speak to Mercy in such a way, Lady Brightwell raises her hand as if to strike the child.

Stephen intervenes, grabbing his stepmother's wrist. He tells her he does not care if she retracts all promised money from Dutton and Isabel—he can no longer stand by and let her behave in such a way, and the children would be better off knowing they are in no way beholden to her for anything. He will do what he can for them, given the legal constraints on his own inheritance, but she is to leave Oxford and not interfere further with their upbringing or education. Lady Brightwell is aghast at her stepson for taking the side of a woman *like that* over someone of his own station. Stephen informs her that Mercy Timperleigh is more of a lady than Lady Brightwell will ever be—and he intends to confirm that conclusion to everyone by marrying Mercy and making *her* Lady Brightwell.

Shocked by Stephen's impassioned speech, Mercy is not certain how to react. But when Lady Brightwell turns her disdain upon Mercy once again, she responds to the pleading look in Stephen's eyes and, for the moment, makes it clear to Lady Brightwell that if Stephen intends to ask her to marry him, she will not be persuaded by the likes of Lady Brightwell out of making her own decision. Lady Brightwell leaves in a huff, calling for the carriage and for her maid to pack her belongings.

After assuring Isabel—clinging in an overjoyed hug to Mercy—and Dutton, who came down to see what the commotion was about, that they can return to school and the farm the next day, Stephen asks them to leave him to speak with Miss Timperleigh alone. Once they have left, Stephen takes Mercy's hands and begs her to forgive him for not being a stronger man, for not sending his stepmother away immediately when she began making demands on him and the children that he knew were not in their best interest. She forgives him, telling him that in her heart, she always believed him a better man than his actions made him look like and if she waited long enough, he would remember it, too. If she can forgive him, he continues, could she possibly love him—love him enough to marry him?

Mercy withdraws her hands from his and tells him the truth about herself—her family history, the shame attached to her wealth, and the reason she started the school. She believes that as a man of decency and honor, he should want nothing more to do with her now that he knows. Stephen asks her what she has done wrong that he should not love her. She is not certain she understands what he means. He tells her his story—of his father's and grandfather's philandering ways, of their many marriages to women who would bring wealth but not happiness to their homes. Of their underhanded business dealings and shady land deals that turned dozens of families off land that had been in their families for generations. He asks her if she should not love him because of the way his predecessors behaved and how they expanded their wealth. Of course not, she responds, he is his own man, and she has seen the good he has done in the community. So he asks her why she is any different, why she should not be considered free from the taint of her ancestors' chosen profession. She had no say in it, and what matters most is the kind of person she has become, and the lives she has impacted so positively over the years her school has been in operation.

The concepts of redemption and forgiveness that she's heard in church so often become clear to Mercy—it does not matter what happened in the past. It is now and the future that matter—how she chooses to live her life going forward, not living constantly with the shame of the past. So when Stephen asks her again if she will marry him, she says yes—she's never shied away from

scandal, and she knows this will definitely cause one. But when Stephen kisses her, all thoughts of the shame of the past and the social scandal to come disappear in favor of the present and allowing herself to feel the love for Stephen she's long held at bay come rushing in. The bliss of the moment is short-lived, though, as Dutton and Isabel burst in and attack them with hugs and kisses and excited chattering about how they'd made a pact to pray that Stephen and Mercy would fall in love and get married.

Mercy and Stephen decide to keep their engagement secret and wait until the summer break from school, and then to marry quietly, by special license, with only a few friends in attendance. Her own happiness allows Mercy to see even more clearly Pippa's heartbreak over Benedict's impending departure in a few months. But she cannot keep paying someone a salary who no longer works for her, and she has made it her practice to hire only women as teachers at the school. And even if she did hire Benedict, she could not pay him more than she pays the other teachers, which would not be enough for him to support a wife and continue to provide support for Pippa's family.

Shortly before the summer break, Stephen, on one of his many visits to the school, asks to speak privately with Mercy. He's had an idea and he wants to discuss it with her to see if she thinks it is possible. Inspired by her success of opening a school that accepts all, regardless of financial ability to pay tuition, he wants to endow a school for boys that will do the same. Mercy fully supports the idea and asks him if he can do it soon enough that he can offer a teaching position to Benedict. No, he responds, he cannot offer Benedict a teaching position. Before Mercy can protest, he explains why: He intends to make Benedict the headmaster of the school. Mercy tells him that it is the most perfect plan; and, after a kiss she knows they should not share in her office, she sends him off to tell Benedict.

Pippa is surprised when, at supper that evening, she is informed that she has a caller asking for her at the front door. She is dismayed when it turns out to be Benedict—and even more so when Mercy happens to walk through the main hall on the way to the dining room. After giving them a stern look, Mercy gives in to Benedict's pleading to have a private word with Pippa and offers to let them use her office—for ten minutes, no longer. Once alone, Benedict draws Pippa into his arms and, after a long kiss, tells her of the new school Lord Brightwell is starting and that he has asked Benedict to be the headmaster—at a salary that will not only enable Benedict and Pippa to marry, but allow them to continue to help her family until her siblings are old enough to help out as well. This time, before he can finish getting the question out, Pippa tells him emphatically that she will, most definitely, marry him.

Epilogue: The citizens of Oxford cannot decide if Lord Brightwell's engagement to a wealthy but untitled schoolmistress or if his determination to start a school for working-class boys is the bigger scandal. Never ones to bow to public sentiment, rather than holding a private, clandestine wedding as originally planned, Stephen and Mercy invite everyone—all of the children and parents from the school and their close friends—to share with them the happiest day of their lives.