

THE RANSOME TRILOGY:

Book 1: *Ransome's Honor*

Book 2: *Ransome's Crossing*

Book 3: *Ransome's Quest*

by Kaye Dacus

Genre: Historical (Regency) Inspirational Romance

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

Promo Sentence: July 1814. Bonaparte has abdicated and the war with France has ended, but the battle of hearts is just beginning.

Competitive Titles: *All the Tea in China* (Jane Orcutt, Revell)
Dawn in My Heart, The Healing Season, Winter is Past (Ruth Axtell Morren, Steeple Hill)
The Miss Pickworth Series, the English Ivy Series (Catherine Palmer, Tyndale)
The Redemption, The Reliance, The Restitution (M. L. Tyndall, Barbour)
A Bride Most Begrudging, The Measure of a Lady, Courting Trouble (DeeAnne Gist, Bethany House)
Just Jane: A Novel of Jane Austen's Life (Nancy Moser, Bethany House)
Joy for Mourning, Beauty for Ashes (Dorothy Clark, Steeple Hill)

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 Regency era started, as it did for most Regency-romance authors, 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. 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 Trilogy: The Ransome Trilogy combines the wit, romance, and social commentary of Jane Austen with the sea-faring adventure of *Horatio Hornblower*.

Ransome's Honor is set in Portsmouth, England, just months after Napoleon Bonaparte's abdication and the seeming end to more than two decades of war with France. Captain William Ransome, an officer renowned throughout the fleet as a man who will never let a woman aboard his ship, has returned to Portsmouth for new orders. Julia Witherington, considered a "right old maid" at twenty-nine years old, has returned to England from her father's sugar plantation in Jamaica after nineteen years away. For half her life, she has despised the name *William Ransome*, because he is the man who stole her father's affections after her twin brother was lost at sea.

Forced by circumstances—and a scheming aunt—to find a husband quickly, Julia turns to the only eligible man in Portsmouth to whom her father, an admiral in the Royal Navy, will not object: William Ransome. With the promise of her thirty-thousand-pound dowry and an annulment after one year, she and William strike a deal and arrange to be married. However, something she never imagined happens: she falls in love with the man she always considered her greatest foe in trying to gain her father's love and attention.

Julia's aunt isn't finished with her schemes and stratagems yet. Julia is given a choice: she can marry her cousin, who needs her money to cover his considerable debts; or, if she refuses and persists in the plan to marry William Ransome, her aunt will spread rumors about William that will ruin his honor and reputation.

Julia offers to let William out of their arrangement, though the thought of losing him, too, breaks her heart. William, however, refuses to give her up, choosing love over honor.

Ransome's Crossing. Charlotte Ransome has a plan: reach Jamaica by any means necessary to marry the man to whom she has been secretly engaged these three months. Disguised as a midshipman, Charlotte signs on to the second Royal Navy ship accompanying the supply convoy being led by her brother's ship.

William and Julia now face the first few weeks of their marriage on the high seas. The seas aren't all that's stormy: the unusual circumstances of their betrothal and hastily scheduled wedding have taken their toll and created an ocean of tension between them as William tries to reconcile his love for the Royal Navy with his love for Julia.

Only a week out of England, the ship Charlotte is on falls prey to attack, and most of the officers are killed in action. William assigns his first officer, Ned Cochrane—a man whom Charlotte met and was attracted to back in Portsmouth—to captain the ship the rest of the journey to Portsmouth.

Ned dreads the daunting burden of taking responsibility for the lives of more than six hundred souls aboard *Audacious*. He doesn't see himself as a leader and prefers to follow rather than make decisions that could cost others their lives—as he had to do in the past, causing the unnecessary deaths of three men under his command. But he has no choice.

Under the close quarters of a ship-of-the-line, Ned quickly recognizes “Midshipman Charles Lott” as none other than Miss Charlotte Ransome. At a resupply stop in Madeira, Ned informs Julia of Charlotte’s presence aboard.

Unsure of how William will react, Julia and Ned agree to keep Charlotte’s secret—for now. William, however, misinterprets his wife and first officer’s tête-à-tête, causing the recently mended tension between them to rear its head again.

Upon arrival in Caribbean waters, Ned and Charlotte both fall ill with yellow fever; and they are brought aboard William’s ship to be cared for. When Charlotte’s condition worsens to the point they fear for her life, William is told the truth of her identity.

Charlotte recovers, and Ned proposes. Though she now knows she never loved her fiancé—because she has fallen in love with Ned—she refuses Ned and tells him the truth of her secret engagement. Ned has no intention of letting her marry the steward of Julia’s sugar plantation, and begins to formulate his own plans.

By the time they reach Jamaica, William and Julia’s relationship seems mortally wounded because of her choice to keep Charlotte’s presence from him. But Julia cannot let William return to sea in search of pirates without trying to reconcile with him. She explains the reasoning behind why she and Ned chose to keep Charlotte’s secret, but apologizes and asks his forgiveness knowing now that it was wrong, that he deserved to know. William, who’s been grieved all along over anything’s coming between them forgives her. Their romantic reconciliation is interrupted by a frantic Ned, sporting a gushing head wound.

Charlotte has been taken by pirates.

Ransome’s Quest. El Salvador has haunted the waters of the Caribbean for almost ten years. Yet it is only slavers and sugar growers who fear his name. To the slaves he rescues and the poor for whom he provides, his reputation is that of a Robin Hood of the West Indies. He knows he is a wanted man: wanted especially by Admiral Sir Edward Witherington, the wealthiest sugar planter in Jamaica, whose ships El Salvador raids with pleasure.

Though fearing for Julia’s safety, William leaves the plantation and searches the crystal waters of the Caribbean, trying to hunt down the pirate who has kidnapped his sister. As he chases down one rumor after another, he becomes more worried about his sister’s continued welfare at the hands of her captor.

Having grown increasingly concerned over inconsistencies in the plantation’s ledgers, Julia confronts her steward, Henry—the man to whom Charlotte has been secretly engaged—with questions. He asks for time to look back through the books and figure out what has gone wrong . . . but the next day, he is nowhere to be found. Assuming the worst, Julia sets out on the ten-mile journey into Kingston to see her banker—but never makes it that far. The sabotaged carriage crashes; when Julia regains consciousness, she is blindfolded, bound, and gagged aboard a ship.

El Salvador's latest captured treasure would try the patience of Job. When he snatched Charlotte Ransome from the Witherington plantation, it was a case of mistaken identity. He meant to capture the mistress of the plantation, Julia Witherington Ransome. Now Charlotte's brother, whose role in key battles against the French are repeated with the air of legend in taverns frequented by pirates and privateers, is searching for him with a dogged determination that El Salvador escapes only by a hair's breadth on several occasions. But another rumor has reached El Salvador's ears: that of the kidnapping of Julia by the man the rest of the pirates all fear—the pirate known only as Shaw. The man from whom he was trying to save her.

When word reaches William of Julia's disappearance, his loyalties are tested and his heart is torn—he cannot abandon the search for his sister, yet he must also rescue Julia. Ned Cochrane, now promoted to Post Captain with command of his own ship, offers a solution: Ned will continue the search for Charlotte while William goes after Julia.

The more William searches for his wife, the more he understands that her abduction has more to do with him and with Admiral Witherington than with Julia or the plantation as he originally thought. With each lead he follows, each man he interrogates, he comes closer to learning the truth: everything began with the fateful voyage nineteen years ago when then-Captain Witherington brought his family to Jamaica aboard his ship.

Ned Cochrane finally overtakes El Salvador's ship—and is surprised when the pirate quickly runs up the white flag of surrender. Boarding the ship prepared for a fight, Ned finds Charlotte sitting in the pirate's cabin drinking tea. Charlotte tells Ned he must listen to the pirate—Julia and William are in grave danger. With some trepidation—and the insistence that Charlotte will come aboard Ned's ship—Ned agrees to partner with El Salvador to find William before he falls into Shaw's trap.

When William arrests his sister's fiancé and interrogates him, he learns that Henry has been in league with the pirate Shaw for a long time—that he courted Charlotte knowing full-well she was William's only sister; that he took the job at the plantation because it was owned by Admiral Witherington; that Shaw has been plotting the downfall of William Ransome and Admiral Witherington for years.

When Julia hears Shaw's story—that he was a sailor on her father's ship who was flogged, then sentenced to death because of an altercation with William when William was only a fifteen-year-old midshipman—and that he has been planning his revenge for nearly twenty years, she tries to make him see reason, to understand that forgiveness, not retribution, will bring him happiness. This earns her the back of his hand and a blackened eye. When she tries to negotiate with him—to tell him her father will pay any amount of ransom he demands—she earns three nights in the bowels of the ship tied to a post with no food or water.

Just when William thinks he is close to capturing Shaw, he is overtaken by two ships—captained by Ned Cochrane and El Salvador, the pirate Admiral Witherington put at the top of William's fugitive list. William refuses to trust the pirate—after all, the man abducted Charlotte.

El Salvador has no time to try to convince William Ransome of his honesty, so he does the only thing he can do to gain the man's trust—reveal his true identity: he is Michael Witherington, Julia's twin brother lost at sea at age fifteen. Captured by pirates, he was forced to work himself nearly to death before the pirate-captain made him his cabin boy, telling Michael his family never responded to the ransom request, therefore never really loved him. He sailed with that crew for nearly five years before striking out on his own, as the morals instilled in him as a boy would not allow him to do what his master asked. Bitter and angry, he struck out at his family the only way he knew how—by attacking ships carrying their gold and their sugar, and liberating the riches to give to those who had none. Although he has always resented Julia for retaining their parents' love, he has always watched over her—always protected her.

Still not certain if he is trustworthy, but knowing time is of the essence, William agrees to allow El Salvador—Michael Witherington—to join them to hunt down Shaw and rescue Julia.

Julia is still in the ship's hold when the thunder of cannon rocks the thick oaken walls surrounding her. One cannonball pierces the hull, and water begins gushing in. Even though the carpenters and bilge-pumpers work to minimize the effects, the hold is soon filling with water. Julia struggles against the bonds she has been working at loosening for three days, and finally—though she wrenches her shoulder out of socket to do so—frees her hands. Chaos reigns on the gun decks above, and she is able to push her way through to the quarterdeck where, from under cover, she can see the three attacking ships—two of which fly the British ensign.

Watching the increasing frenzy on Shaw's ship through his telescope, Michael nearly orders his crew to cease firing when he sees a flash of blue skirt ducking behind the foremast. For the first time in fifteen years, he prays—for his sister's safety.

Employing a maneuver he used against a French ship in the war, William and Michael both get their ships close enough to Shaw's to send over boarding parties. William is amongst the first over, desperate to find Julia. As the foremast splinters from a direct cannon hit and then starts to fall, William sees Michael carrying a struggling Julia back to his ship.

Michael reveals his identity to Julia and begs her forgiveness. He tells her that even if their father never loved him, he knew Julia did; and it was unfair for Michael to let her believe he was dead for so many years. Julia, who never wanted to believe he was dead, forgives him. But she tells him he must go to England to see their father—that she knows he loved Michael and mourned his loss. She also tells him the family never received a ransom request, but that her father would have paid any amount to get Michael back.

Praying Julia is safe with her brother, William scours the ship searching for Shaw. It doesn't take him long to find the pirate. William's skill with a sword is better than Shaw's, and, nineteen years after sentencing, Shaw finally meets his death. Soon thereafter, the rest of the crew surrender.

On neutral ground, Julia and William are reunited, neither wanting to let the other out of sight for a very long time. When William commences with having Michael arrested, both Julia and

Charlotte intervene. William finally agrees to a conditional arrest: Michael will be taken back to England by Ned and turned over to Admiral Witherington.

Charlotte is shocked to learn of her fiancé's treachery, but relieved she is no longer bound by honor to marry him. She immediately tells Ned if his offer of marriage is still open, she accepts. They are married on the beach at the plantation before sailing for England.

Not wanting to be separated from Julia again, William considers resigning his commission. Julia, who also wishes to keep him close by, knows that once he has recovered from the turmoil of recent events, he would regret a decision to leave the navy. She convinces him to stay and helps him to see it is not his duty nor his loyalty that has changed, only his quest.

His quest will no longer be for battles or promotion; his quest will be to return safely home to her at the end of each mission.