



Second Chance Cinderella (Love Inspired Historical)

By Carla Capshaw

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'I'll Wait for You Forever.'

Heartbroken when her childhood love never returned, Rose Smith soon learned she had even greater worries—she carried his child. Ten years later as a housemaid in London, she encounters Samuel Blackstone. The kind youth she adored has turned bitter with success. Feeling out of place in Sam's high-society world, Rose fears what he may do when he learns of their son....

A wealthy stockbroker, Sam is used to getting what he wants. And when he learns that Rose bore him a son, he wants to claim his family. But he'll have to convince Rose to trust him again if he's to have any hope of meeting the boy...or recapturing her heart.

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Second Chance Cinderella (Love Inspired Historical) By Carla Capshaw Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #574172 in eBooks
- Published on: 2014-07-01
- Released on: 2014-07-01
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Florida native Carla Capshaw always dreamed of traveling the world and writing novels. After visiting numerous countries, she finally put pen to paper and has been writing ever since.

A winner of two RWA Golden Hearts and a double Rita finalist, Carla writes romances with strong conflicts, vivid characters and a Christian worldview.

Carla loves to hear from her readers. Please visit her at www.carlacapshaw.com.

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London, England

September, 1842

It was the woman's hair that drew Sam Blackstone's full attention. The waterfall of gold tumbling down her narrow back from beneath a serviceable black bonnet reminded him of Rose Smith. As the blonde disappeared into the sea of pedestrians, his mood soured that same instant. The last thing he wanted or needed was a morning poisoned by memories of the past.

Relying on the years of strict mental discipline he'd employed to rise from being a village ne'er-do-well to one of London's most prominent stockbrokers, he forced memories of Rose's betrayal from his mind and descended the wide front steps of his elegant Mayfair townhouse.

In the past nine years, he'd played the game well and few challenges remained. He'd acquired more wealth than he'd ever dreamed as a young orphan in Ashby Croft. Far from going to bed with an empty stomach gnawing his ribs, sleeping in a drafty hovel and wearing itchy rags, he dined on delicacies, lived in a mansion and dressed in the finest Savile Row suits. Few rivaled his influence in financial circles. His advice on monetary matters was sought by everyone from potato farmers to Parliament members.

His driver opened the coach's door. Sam climbed in and sat heavily on the black, embossed leather seat, impatient to get underway.

As he waited, his gaze slid back to the Georgian edifice he'd acquired three years earlier. The echoing monstrosity boasted every luxury and admirably performed its duty to impress, but the residence was devoid of human warmth or cheer. He much preferred to spend his waking hours at the city offices of Stark, Winters and Blackstone or overseeing the firm's vigorous trade of commodities at the Exchange in Capel Court.

"Beggin' yer pardon for the delay, sir," his driver, Gibson, said over the din of the busy street. "Oxford's in a tangle. The fine weather's drawn everyone out. I 'spect there's nary a church mouse to be found indoors at present."

The coach finally pulled away from the curb. The pungent aroma of horseflesh and smoke carried on the air. Sam consulted his pocket watch before extracting several reports from the leather portfolio he'd brought with him. Not one to waste time when there was more wealth to be gleaned, he shuffled through the pages.

The list of figures blurred and the brisk activity all around him faded as his mind wandered to the taunting vision of the woman with blond hair. Something about the stranger beckoned him to find her, but he remained in his seat, determined to shut her out with a stubbornness that bordered on vice. She was nothing and no one to him. True, she'd been of similar height and build as Rose. And that golden hair—such a unique color. What if, by some twist of fate, Rose had come up to London and—

He scrubbed his hand over his eyes, dispelling the wild notion before his imagination grew to unrealistic proportions. Nine years had come and gone since he'd left tiny Ashby Croft. He was never going to see Rose again, and frankly, good riddance. Far from waiting for him as she'd promised, she'd married another bloke within months of his leaving. If a heart could break into a thousand jagged pieces, his had the day he'd returned to Devonshire to collect her and learned she'd thrown him over for someone else.

As much as he'd tried to forget her, the foul taste of her faithlessness had tainted every day for him since.

Despising the black mood overtaking him, he stuffed the reports back into the portfolio and closed the latch. The flow of vehicles congesting the street had slowed to a standstill. "How much longer, Gibson?" he demanded. "The 'Change opens in an hour."

"Yes, sir, but—"

"Bother this." Sam thrust the door open and climbed down from the vehicle. "I'm certain I'll find the pace more brisk if I walk. Pick me up at half past six as usual...if you manage to be free by then."

"Forgive me, sir, but shall I make that half past five? I overheard Cook say you was dinin' with guests tonight."

Sam frowned. He'd forgotten all about his dinner companions, including Lord Sanbourne and his beguiling daughter, Amelia, who was to serve as his hostess for the evening. "Right you are, Gibson. Half past five."

The driver tipped his cap with a quick, "Aye, sir," before pulling along the curb and setting the brake. The matched pair of gray geldings hitched to the conveyance whinnied and shook their heads as though disappointed by the loss of their morning exercise.

Portfolio in hand, Sam started off, shouldering his way through the occasional gaps that opened between his fellow pedestrians. He pressed his top hat tighter to his head to keep it from being dislodged by one of the frequent gusts of wind. At Oxford Street a seemingly endless row of traffic forced him to wait on the crowded corner.

"My, what a glorious day," a lady in front of him cooed, nearly poking him in the eye with her ruffled parasol.

"Indeed, 'tis marvelous," her elegant companion agreed.

Sam supposed it was true. The sun shone with undaunted enthusiasm, and rather than fog or London's usual gray haze of coal smoke, the air seemed clear for once. Pots of flowers graced the steps and entryways of the grand terraces on both sides of the busy thoroughfare. Their late-summer blooms shone in shades of bright pink, fiery-red and, to Sam's everlasting irritation, a golden-yellow that once again reminded him of Rose's burnished hair.

Gritting his teeth, he headed toward Regent Street.

He wasn't one for mysteries. He understood himself well enough to know that if he didn't at least try to ascertain the truth of the blonde's identity his imagination would pester him forever.

Aware of the unlikelihood of finding the stranger in the crush of people and that a solid quarter of an hour had passed since he'd first caught sight of her, he soldiered on as though some insistent, yet invisible force were pulling him forward.

Half a block later he began to wonder if he should retire to Bedlam. If there'd ever been a wild-goose chase, he was on it. Feeling foolish to his core, he scanned the hustle and bustle along the street and shook his head at his own stupidity. The woman, whoever she was, had disappeared like a vapor in the wind.

Annoyed by the bitter disappointment that assailed him, he wedged the portfolio under his arm, removed his top hat and combed a hand through his short, black hair. With a sinking heart, he wondered if he'd ever be truly free of Rose Smith.

His hat back in place, he was determined to forget the blonde and the lunacy that compelled him to chase after her. The pounding of workmen's hammers making repairs on the row of buildings behind him mixed with the call of newspaper boys and the clamor of horses and carriages. In the distance, the bass notes of a church bell announced the ninth hour.

A momentary break in the rank of pedestrians allowed him a glimpse of his quarry on the corner at the next block. His heart kicked against his ribs. He sprinted after her, her lovely hair drawing him like a lodestar as he pushed through the gaggle of people meandering along the footpath.

A gust of wind swished the lady's cape up and out behind her. She carried a battered valise he hadn't noticed before, and the black garb she wore appeared to be the typical frock of a servant.

A passing barouche and row of horse carts impeded his progress at the corner of Holles Street. For a few, tension-filled moments he feared he'd lost her again, but the way cleared in time for him to see her stop in front of a Palladian townhouse on the east side of Cavendish Square. Although she stood in profile, the details of her face were obscured by the bill of her bonnet. Her head nodded as she looked from the front of the building to a piece of paper she held.

The paper gave him pause. Rose didn't know how to read, or at least she hadn't when he'd known her. Perhaps she'd learned in the past nine years, the same as he had acquired new skills and bettered himself.

He picked up his pace. "Rose!" he shouted, drawing startled looks from the other walkers, but he paid them no mind. "Rose!" he called again, dodging several horses as he crossed to the square. No response. Either she didn't hear him over the activity in the street or he had the wrong woman altogether.

And yet she seemed so familiar. The fluid way she walked, the expressive tilt of her head... The cape she wore made it difficult to tell, but now that he'd had a better look, she seemed shapelier in the hips and bust than his Rose had been. But wasn't that to be expected? She was no longer a girl of sixteen, but a mature woman of twenty-five.

The mystery lady disappeared down the townhouse steps leading to the servants' entrance. Sam yanked off his hat and broke into a run. A door slammed just as he reached the front of the house. He moved to the

narrow flight of steps he'd seen the woman take and stared at the scuffed black door that led to a basement and the source of the rich aromas filling the air.

Sam slapped his hat against his thigh in frustration. He considered inquiring after the woman but discarded the notion. Servants were often a prickly lot with an abhorrence for being intruded upon by outsiders.

Besides, what would he do if he found out his quarry did happen to be Rose? Strangling her wasn't an option and he doubted she'd come willingly to the door to hear his abysmal opinion of her.

He noted the address. The townhouse boasted mansion-size proportions, wide front steps, imposing columns and lead-glass windows. If he wasn't mistaken, the edifice belonged to Baron Malbury, a shifty fellow who'd risen to his current status through the untimely death of his predecessor in a boating accident the previous month.

Sam had been reluctant to take on the self-important, nearly impoverished peer as a client, but if Malbury employed Rose, he'd have to reevaluate the situation and determine the best way to use the connection to his advantage.

Sam returned to the corner across the street and called to a newspaper boy leaning on the gas lamp.

"Aye, govna?" the boy rang out as he bounded over to him. A child of no more than seven or eight, he was unkempt with dirt smudges on his cheeks, his muddy-brown hair uncombed. His ragged clothes were too big for his scrawny frame and the hungry look about him reminded Sam of his own miserable childhood. "You wan' ta buy a paypa?"

Sam shook his head. He'd already looked over *The Times* at breakfast. "What's your name, young man?"

"Georgie, sir."

"Well, Georgie, I have a proposition for you. How would you like to earn a quid for say...ten minutes of your time?"

Georgie's brown eyes rounded with a hopeful eagerness he couldn't quite hide. "If it ain't on the up and up, me mum—"

"Oh, it's honest, all right. You needn't worry. I want you to go to the servants' entrance of that residence—" he pointed to the Malbury mansion"—and ask if there's a maid by the name of Rose employed there. If so, ask if her name was Rose Smith before she married. Do you think you could do that for me?"

"That's all I 'ave to do for a 'ole quid?"

Sam nodded. His gaze slid back to the mansion. His eyes narrowed on the glossy front door. Curiosity burned in his veins. "Yes, and if you hurry I'll give you two."

Georgie took off at a flat run.

Praying she'd come to the right place, Rose knocked on the kitchen door. Ever since she'd become a Christian eight years ago, she'd relied on the Lord to direct her path. Relying on His guidance eased her mind when the shifting letters and numbers others seemed to read with ease made little sense to her.

The scuffed black door swung open. "Ye're late," said a young, frowning kitchen maid.

She blinked, surprised to see a woman instead of a footman answer the door. "I know. I apologize. The coach from Paddington station suffered a broken wheel." Her heart racing from the mad pace she'd kept in her failed attempt to arrive on time, she switched her battered valise to her other hand and descended the final step into the basement. A blast of heat assaulted her along with the aroma of roasted fowl. "I had to walk the last few miles and I lost my way a bit. I came as quick as I could."

The door slammed shut behind her as the dour-faced Scot ushered her farther into the entryway. A stone arch separated the small space from the ovens and activity of the kitchen beyond. The harried staff reminded her of the frantic crowds in the maze of streets outside.

"Then yoo'd best get settled an' tae work straight awa'," said the maid. Dressed in a column of black wool and a sullied white apron, the young woman inspected her with a quick, unimpressed glance. "I don't ken how ye bumpkins in th' coontry work, but our cook, Mrs. Pickles, isna a body for tardiness or excuses of any kind."

Taking exception to being called a bumpkin, Rose bit back a tart reply as she followed the maid down a hallway that led to a spiral staircase. Before leaving Hopewell Manor, the Malbury family's country estate where she'd been in service for the past eight years, she'd been forewarned of the infamous Mrs. Pickles's reputation as a taskmaster. It was said the cook ran her kitchen like Wellington at Waterloo and with nearly as many casualties.

The mere thought of losing her job made Rose's stomach churn. It was imperative that she make a favorable impression on the irascible woman who held Rose's job in her hands. Rose was on excellent terms with the staff at Hopewell Manor and only in London for a fortnight to help with a shortage of trained servants in the townhouse kitchen, but that did not mean she couldn't be dismissed. The tragic death of the previous baron and his wife had put the livelihood of every Malbury employee in jeopardy.

Apparently, the new baron had inherited the title and lands with very little coin to sustain the expenses that accompanied the prize. His servants worried he planned to terminate long-term staff in favor of importing cheaper, Irish labor. Nothing could be taken for granted, nor a foot placed wrong. She could not afford to be sacked. Finding another position was nigh impossible for anyone and doubly so for a woman in her precarious situation.

"My name is Rose Smith, by the way," she said over the banging of pans and calls for more boiling water.

"Ah be Ina McDonald."

"Have you been in service here long?" Rose asked as they reached the third floor.

"Six months. Five and a half too many if ye ask me. Min', th' auld baron an' baroness were kind enough, but Mrs. Pickles makes every day a sour circumstance." Ina took a skeleton key from her skirt pocket and unlocked a door across the hall. "Ye'll be sharin' quarters wi' me whilst ye're here. Keep yer belongings tae yer own side of the room an' we'll get on jus' dandy."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Lucille Wood:

Have you spare time for a day? What do you do when you have considerably more or little spare time? Yep, you can choose the suitable activity intended for spend your time. Any person spent their own spare time to take a wander, shopping, or went to typically the Mall. How about open or even read a book titled Second Chance Cinderella (Love Inspired Historical)? Maybe it is to be best activity for you. You realize beside you can spend your time together with your favorite's book, you can smarter than before. Do you agree with their opinion or you have some other opinion?

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