

LAND OF THE LONE STAR ★ BOOK THREE



TAMING  
THE  
WIND

TRACIE  
PETERSON



BETHANY HOUSE PUBLISHERS

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To Dr. Dennis Maier  
an extraordinary surgeon  
who has a great sense of humor  
and bedside manner.  
God bless your work!







## NORTH TEXAS, MARCH 1868

**I**t is a lovely place for a horse farm,” Carissa Lowe told her sister. She glanced around the lush, green acreage. The serenity found here spoke to her in a way the city hadn’t. “I can certainly see why Brandon loves it so.”

“Well, I love it even more now that you and Gloria have decided to join us. I’m glad that Mother and Father decided to go north to see Uncle Robert. The trip away from Corpus Christi will do Mother a world of good.”

Carissa glanced to where her nearly two-year-old daughter, Gloria, played happily with Laura and Brandon’s little boy, Daniel. At a year and a half, he cautiously explored his environment, while Gloria had seemingly

no fear whatsoever. Even now she was trying to climb the rail posts of the nearest fence.

“Gloria, get down from there,” Carissa called. “You know you aren’t supposed to climb the fence.” In the distance she heard the low rumble of thunder.

“You too, Daniel,” Laura added. The child looked at his mother momentarily before re-focusing on the fence.

Carissa went in the direction of her daughter and caught up to her before Gloria could renew her efforts. “It’s nap time,” she told her daughter.

“No nap! No nap!” Gloria declared with great insistence.

“You too, little man,” Laura said, grasping her son’s hand.

Daniel wiggled to get away, but Laura held him fast. Carissa stroked her daughter’s blond hair and smiled as she calmed. “Just take a very little nap, and then we will go see the new horses.”

Gloria clapped her hands. “Horsey. I wanna see horsey.”

“After your nap,” Carissa assured. Thunder rumbled once again, and Carissa looked beyond the trees to the billowing clouds on the horizon. They didn’t seem particularly threatening or dark, but apparently a storm was brewing. “I suppose it’s going to rain,”

she told her sister. Clapping had become Gloria's new means of communication, and she gave a hearty applause at the comment about rain.

Laura lifted Daniel to her left hip. "We'd best get the laundry off the line in a hurry."

"If you'll take the children, I'll get the clothes," Carissa replied. Laura nodded and swung Gloria onto her right hip.

"I'll be there to tuck you in, Gloria. Just get on your bed and wait for me." Carissa leaned over to kiss her daughter's head, then hurried to retrieve the laundry basket.

She couldn't help but smile as she thought about her child. Thunder and winds never seemed to disturb Gloria, and Carissa couldn't help but wonder if it was somehow related to the fact that Gloria had been conceived and carried amidst great strife and trial. Daniel often cried during storms, but not Gloria. Storms were just a way of life for Carissa and Gloria.

There were just a few dresses and shirts to contend with, so Carissa pulled them quickly from the line and placed them in the basket. There was a nice table on the back porch where she could dump the load and come back for the towels. She worked quickly and barely beat the rain as she pulled the last of the towels from the line. By the time she made

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it back to the house, the rain began to pour in a fury.

She left the towels on the table with the other things and made her way to the room she shared with Gloria. To her surprise, the child was already asleep, and Carissa couldn't help but sit down beside her for a moment. It was a miracle the child had ever been born. Gloria's father, Malcolm Lowe, had thrown Carissa down a flight of stairs when she was only a few weeks pregnant. She'd been certain she would miscarry, but when she didn't, Carissa thought of the unborn child as her consolation for a miserable marriage. A short time later, her husband again threatened her life.

Though she'd fallen for his charms as they courted, Malcolm had revealed his true nature once they'd wed. With the Union Army after him, he'd done his best to slip from their capture by kidnapping Carissa and Laura, figuring to use them to keep the law at bay. He also planned to kill them both for interfering in his plans. Later, when surrounded by soldiers, Malcolm attempted to escape by water and ended up throwing Carissa into the Gulf off the shores of Corpus Christi, in order to distract his pursuers. But that distraction had been short-lived. In the end, Malcolm had perished from wounds given him by the

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soldiers. Laura, too, had nearly drowned, but Brandon had saved her. Tyler Atherton had been responsible for rescuing Carissa.

When Malcolm nearly succeeded in ending her life, Carissa found little to live for, she was so devoid of hope. But the growing life inside of her compelled Carissa to live . . . and Gloria was the beautiful result.

“You are more than my consolation,” she told Gloria, kissing the sleeping girl. “You are the very reason I rise in the morning.”

Daniel was fussing, and Carissa knew her sister would have a difficult time calming him, especially with the constant rumble of the thunder. Laura would no doubt be a while, rocking and singing the boy to sleep.

Carissa quietly exited the bedroom and walked to the front-room window to look out on the storm. Thunder rumbled again and again while the rain steadily fell. *Just a spring storm*, she thought. Hopefully there wouldn't be any hail or tornadoes to contend with. She sighed and watched a bit longer at the window.

She had never intended to live here on the farm with Laura and Brandon. For the last two years she'd resided with her parents in Corpus Christi and quite happily vowed to remain there. Well, perhaps *happy* wasn't a word that Carissa could associate with her life.

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She had never felt all that close to her mother and father, and she knew full well that the fault was her own. Widowhood and being a mother had softened her heart in a way that made Carissa regret her actions in the past.

With Malcolm dead at the hands of the army, Carissa was grateful for her parents' care and accepted that widowhood would be her lot in life. In fact, she cherished it. She never again wanted to have to deal with a deceiving husband. Instead, she would use her days to be a good mother and perhaps improve her relationship with her parents.

Of course, despite her resolve, the men didn't keep from calling. She had never suffered for suitors. But after Malcolm, Carissa was wary of any man save her father, brother-in-law, and Tyler Atherton—and in truth she hadn't had many dealings with the latter. After he had saved her life, Carissa had seen very little of the man, and it was just as well. Something about Tyler's gentle manner touched her heart in a way she would just as soon forget. She reasoned she only felt drawn to him because he'd saved her life. It seemed a sensible explanation.

It was best, Carissa determined, to remain on her guard where men were concerned. She'd thought she'd known Malcolm so well, despite the fact that he always told her his

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business was to remain his alone, and that she should refrain from asking too many questions.

Carissa could never quite understand his insistence until the truth came out and she learned that for Malcolm, the War Between the States had never ended. Brandon once told her that it hadn't ended for a lot of people. Even now, nearly three years after Lee's surrender at Appomattox Courthouse, folks were still at war. At least their own personal war.

Fortunately, Carissa's family were Union supporters. So, too, were many of the families in their social circle of Corpus Christi. There were plenty of Confederates, but also a good number of people who simply supported Texas rather than siding with either the North or the South. Carissa knew that Tyler Atherton had fought for the South, just as her husband had. But where Malcolm had been made hateful and bitter by the war, Tyler was sad and regretful. She much preferred the latter's way of thinking. She couldn't see how either side had truly won anything, given that families had been set against each other and hundreds of thousands of lives had been lost.

*I'm only twenty-one, she thought, yet already my life feels as if it has concluded.*

“You seem awfully quiet,” Laura said,

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entering the room. “I suppose you’re thinking deep thoughts.”

Carissa startled at the comment. “I was, actually.” She smiled. “Did Daniel finally settle down?”

Laura smiled. “Yes. He was very tired and despite the storm, he nodded right off. I hope this next baby is a little . . . calmer,” she said, putting her hand to her growing abdomen. “But no matter. August can’t get here soon enough, and I’m so glad that you’re here to help. Already I feel as though I’ve been carrying this one forever.”

“The baby will be here before you know it.” Carissa forced a smile and went to the sewing basket. “Besides, I thought the doctor told you that you might well expect to deliver in July.”

“I know. But July or August, I wish it were sooner.”

Carissa nodded, knowing just how confining a pregnancy could be. “I’ll work just a little while on this mending, and then after the storm passes I’ll start the ironing. I think I’ll iron on the porch. Maybe the air will be cooler after the rain.”

“I’ve been thinking we’re going to need to make some new curtains for the upstairs bedrooms once Brandon finishes painting them. Goodness, but there is so much work to do

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on this place. I had thought it to be in perfect condition until we actually moved in. It seems my list of things to do only grows.”

“Still, it’s very nice.” Carissa picked up one of Brandon’s shirts and began to fix a loose button. “And I am grateful that you are allowing me to stay all through the spring and summer. I had no desire to travel with Mother and listen to her rant about all the injustices of the world and instruct me in mothering Gloria. My patience has been wearing thin.”

“I’m sorry she’s so hard on you.”

Carissa paused in her work. “I suppose I deserve it. I’ve been hard on her . . . so I’m trying to use our time together to mend some of the tears in our past.”

Laura met her gaze and nodded. “I’m glad you’re here all the same. I missed you so much, Carissa. Leaving Corpus Christi wasn’t easy for Brandon or me. I truly loved teaching, though when the Freemen’s Bureau took over education issues for the former slaves, our little school became obsolete. I suppose it was for the best, since I was expecting Daniel, but nevertheless, I do miss teaching.”

Laura walked to the window. “Looks like the storm has passed. It’s raining very lightly now.” She dropped the curtain back in place. “I’ll get the irons heating and then

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start supper.” Laura took a few steps, then turned back. “I’m hopeful that once the horse farm begins to support itself, we’ll be able to at least hire a good cook.”

When Carissa said nothing more, Laura left the room. It wasn’t Carissa’s intention to slight her sister, but she had no desire for conversation and pleasantries. For the last two years Carissa had been longing to find peace of heart, but that peace seemed to elude her. At night when she slept . . . if she slept . . . she continued to have nightmares about all that had happened in her brief marriage to Malcolm. She silently wondered if the bad memories would ever leave her.

Mother had always told her daughters that dwelling on lovely things would cause bad thoughts to disappear. Carissa never found it to be completely true, but always tried to embrace the practice. Yet even now as the storm faded and Gloria slept, Carissa struggled to think of the good things in life.

*I’m safe, and I have a beautiful daughter. Father and Mother have blessed me with a monthly income, and I needn’t worry about finding a new husband, unless Mother gets a bee in her bonnet—which she has been known to do. Carissa sighed and tried again to think positive thoughts. I have a home here for the time, and it’s a beautiful place. And I have the love of Laura*

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*and Brandon, as well as Mother and Father.*  
Why wasn't it enough?

She thought momentarily of Tyler Atherton. He was a compassionate man; even in their early acquaintance, when Carissa had been self-centered and immature, Tyler had been patient and kind. She couldn't help but wonder how he was doing. Brandon mentioned that he lived not so far away on the Barnett ranch. Tyler's own family property had been confiscated for his having served with the Confederate troops. She thought it unfair, as did William Barnett, Tyler's good friend. Barnett had immediately gone to plead on Tyler's behalf, but so far it hadn't rectified the situation. For now, Tyler worked and lived with him.

A knock sounded at the front door, and Carissa jumped to her feet. They weren't expecting anyone, so when to her surprise she opened the door to find Tyler Atherton, it was almost as if she'd conjured him up and set him at her door.

"Mr. Atherton." For a moment she couldn't think of what else to say. Finally she stepped back. "Won't you come in?"

"Thank you," he said, pulling his hat off. Water sprinkled Carissa's face and gown. "Oh . . . I'm . . . I'm so sorry." He slapped the hat against his thigh to release more water.

“The rain has stopped, but I’m afraid I rode through the worst of it.” He pulled off his rain slicker and threw it over the porch rail. “At least most of me stayed pretty dry.”

“If you came to see my brother-in-law, you’re too late. He isn’t here. He rode out to someone’s ranch to look at stock. He should be home for supper.” Carissa smiled and tried to sound nonchalant. “And if you came for supper . . . well, you’re early.”

He laughed. “I did come to see Brandon, but that can wait. Perhaps you’d grant me the pleasure of your company and tell me how you’ve been. It’s been a very long time since we last met. I ran into Brandon at the mercantile the other day, and he mentioned that you’d be staying the summer.”

“Yes, that is the plan. Mother and Father traveled to Chicago, then plan to go abroad until September. I chose to come here to be with Laura and Brandon. I believe I can make myself useful to them.”

“I’m quite certain you will be very helpful.” He glanced over her shoulder. “And what of your . . . daughter?”

“She’s sleeping. Perhaps if you’re here when she awakens, I can introduce the two of you.”

“I’d like that.” Tyler smiled in that warm, casual way he possessed. Carissa had always liked his smile and couldn’t help but return it.

“Why don’t I have Laura come speak with you about Brandon.” She stepped back from the entryway. “You can wait for her in the front room.” Carissa motioned for him to follow.

“Why don’t I just sit here with you and visit while you sew?” he questioned, nodding to the shirt she still held in her hand. “I don’t need to bother Laura.”

Carissa looked at the shirt and then back to Tyler. “I suppose . . . for just . . . just a while,” she replied. “I plan to iron clothes as soon as the irons are hot. Now that the rain has stopped, I thought I’d do so on the porch, where the breeze after the storm might keep things cooler.”

“That’s fine.” He stepped past her into the room. “Where are you sitting?”

She hesitated. Visiting with Tyler Atherton wasn’t exactly what she’d expected, but she crossed the room and took her seat in a small but comfortable chair. Tyler wasn’t far behind. He grabbed a larger wing-backed chair and pulled it close.

“So . . . how are you?” she asked, trying hard to focus on her stitches rather than on Tyler’s tanned face.

“Well enough. I don’t know if you heard or not, but I’m stayin’ with Will Barnett and his family.” He paused, seeming to carefully

weigh his words. “The government took away my ranch.”

“I had heard something to that effect. I think it’s wrong of them,” she added quickly. For some reason it felt important that he know her thoughts on the matter.

“I have some cattle that I’ve been running for a few years with Will’s, so at least they are still mine. William’s also fighting to get my ranch returned, but it isn’t looking great.”

“I’m sorry to hear that.” And she was, even though it had nothing to do with her. “Can you sell some of the cows and buy new land?”

“The government isn’t all that inclined to help an ex-Reb. That’s why I’m dependent on William for help. If all else fails, he thinks he’ll buy the ranch, then sell it back to me.”

“That’s quite generous . . . and kind.” She looked up again and had a harder time looking away. “He must be a very dear friend.”

“He is. We’ve been working together since the war ended, and our cattle herds have grown considerably. This last year we moved them north on open range to avoid tick fever. Now our plans are coming together to drive them to sell in Kansas.”

“Why can’t you sell your cows here, Mr. Atherton?”

“Whoa, right there. You call me Tyler, and I’ll call you Carissa. We’ve gone through too much to start puttin’ on airs now.”

She nodded. “I suppose you’re right.”

“And second, cows are females and I have both males and females. My plan is to drive the fattened males—the steers—to market in Kansas because the prices are ten times what I can get here in Texas. William wants to do likewise, and we have another friend, Ted Terry, who also wants in on it. That’s why I came to talk to Brandon today. We’re going to need a good wrangler. Having someone to handle the horses is critical.”

“Well, Brandon would definitely be able to do that job. He has a way with horses that I don’t think I’ve ever seen before . . . unless, of course, it was my sister’s abilities. I’ve never seen anyone quite like Laura dealing with a horse.”

“And what of you? Do you also have a way with horses?”

Carissa shook her head. “I haven’t ridden in years.”

“We should rectify that,” Tyler said, grinning. “I’d be happy to take you out. This is some mighty fine land for riding.”

“I doubt you would be quite so happy after spending a day picking me up off the ground and listening to me complaining about all my

aches and pains.” She shrugged. “But one can never tell.”

“Why, Tyler Atherton, I didn’t know you were here,” Laura said, entering the room.

“I only just arrived.” He got to his feet. “I came to see your husband, but I understand he’s out.”

“Yes, but he’s due back anytime. Won’t you stay and join us for supper? I’m not the best cook in the world, but I am learning. In fact, Carissa has taught me quite a few tricks.”

Embarrassed by her sister’s praise, Carissa put aside the sewing. “I’m going to gather the clothes for ironing.” She left before either could protest. She hated to admit it, but Tyler’s presence flooded her mind with painful longing. She had loved the attention of boys when she’d been younger. When Malcolm had paid her court, she felt like the belle of Corpus Christi. Men used to fall at her feet if she so much as gave them a second glance, and now she wanted nothing to do with them. But at the same time . . . she was lonely for a man’s attention.

“What in the world is wrong with me?” she asked as she made her way to the back porch. “Haven’t you been through enough, Carissa?”

She began sorting through a tableful of dried but wrinkled clothes. *I must be a glutton*

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*for punishment, she thought. To feel things I swore I'd never allow myself to feel again. What a troublesome woman I've become.*

“Would you like some help?”

She looked up, feeling almost frantic at the sound of Tyler's voice. “That isn't necessary.”

“I know, but I'd like to help you if I can.”

Carissa wadded a calico gown into a roll and stuffed it in the basket. “I'm perfectly capable. I might not be able to ride horses, but I can keep a house. You might as well rest and wait for Brandon. I'm sure Laura will fix you some refreshments.”

“She's already offered,” Tyler said, reaching out to take hold of one of Brandon's shirts. “I told her I can wait until supper and that I'd just as soon come out here and talk with you. She seemed relieved.”

*Like I would be if you'd leave.*

“So I was thinking we might go riding on Saturday. Would that be acceptable to you?”

Carissa mashed another gown into the basket and frowned. “I . . . well . . . it is hard for me to make plans. With Gloria, I'm never certain what I'll be able to do.”

“So you named her Gloria? That's an unusual name.” He placed the carefully folded shirt in the basket atop the wrinkled gowns.

“I suppose it is,” Carissa replied. “I wanted

something that sounded pretty, and happy. You probably think me silly, and I couldn't blame you if you did, but it's from the Bible when the angels were praising God. Carlita, our maid, was singing a song one day, and I kept hearing her say, 'Gloria in excelsis Deo.' I asked her what it meant, and she said, 'Glory to God in the highest.' Only in the Latin, they say *Gloria*. I thought it made a sweet-sounding name."

Tyler nodded. "I think so, too."

Carissa didn't know what to say after that, so instead went to pick up the laundry basket. But Tyler wouldn't allow her to carry it.

"I plan to talk with you while you iron, so I might as well carry this for you."

She bit her lip, wondering how she could tell him that she didn't want to talk to him. All that they shared between them was in the past, where she wanted it to remain.

"The world feels new after a rain, doesn't it?" he asked, looking at her intently. Then, as if he knew her thoughts, he continued. "Makes me want to leave the past firmly behind me, and concentrate only on what's ahead. To a brighter future."

Carissa gave a brief nod, then tried to ignore the way his glance seemed to steal a look all the way into her soul.