

LONDON BEGINNINGS • BOOK 1

*The*  
CAPTAIN'S  
DAUGHTER

JENNIFER DELAMERE



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*For Elaine Luddy Klonicki,  
with heartfelt thanks  
for your insight and friendship*



“A man’s heart deviseth his way:  
but the Lord directeth his steps.”

—PROVERBS 16:9

“His compassions fail not. They  
are new every morning: great is  
thy faithfulness.”

—LAMENTATIONS 3:22–23



# Prologue

DARTMOOR COAST, ENGLAND, 1873

I'M NOT SURPRISED to find you here," Rosalyn Bernay said, wrapping an arm around her sister's waist.

Cara leaned into her, acknowledging the gesture, but her eyes never stopped scanning the crashing waves on the rocky coastline beneath them. The wind whipped at their dresses and at Cara's bonnet, which was dangling, as usual, down her back. After a few moments Cara murmured, "Will you sing to me?"

Rosalyn didn't have to ask which song. Lately Cara had taken to requesting the lullaby their mother used to sing to them. Now, when they were on the verge of parting, Rosalyn couldn't fault her sister for it. She began to sing, soft and low. Somehow it didn't seem strange to be singing a lullaby on a bright afternoon. They had always taken comfort in it.

The breeze gently carried away the final notes as Rosalyn reached the end of the last verse. Cara remained silent but stayed close. Behind them, they could hear the shouts of a hundred other girls—fellow residents of George Müller's orphanage—playing on the wide meadow that led down to the cliffs.

"Penny for your thoughts," Rosalyn prompted, although she could well guess what was on her baby sister's mind. Cara was thirteen—at the brink of womanhood—but to Rosalyn, she would always be the curly-headed toddler who clung to her so relentlessly the day the three sisters had been brought to the orphanage.

Cara gave a long sigh. "How I will miss hearing that song when you go away." She tore her gaze from the sea, her wide, blue eyes searching Rosalyn's face. "I wish you weren't leaving. Not just yet."

Rosalyn tried to give her a reassuring smile. "I'm seventeen now. It's time for me to make my own way in the world. The Müllers are kind and generous, but not even they can support us forever."

Cara took Rosalyn's hand in an impulsive gesture. "Can I come with you, then?"

Rosalyn laughed. "I don't think Mrs. Williams will be pleased if her new maid arrives with a young sister in tow."

"But I could work too. I already know how to wash, iron, and clean. Besides, lots of girls go into service at my age."

With her free hand, Rosalyn tucked a golden curl behind Cara's ear. "Somehow, I don't think this is about your keenness to become a housemaid."

Cara's grip tightened. "I just hate that we'll be broken up. After all, we promised Mama—"

"I'm sure Mama knew that one day we would grow up and begin separate lives. Besides, aren't you forgetting about Julia? Are you so willing to abandon her?"

Cara frowned. "Jules has no problem looking after herself. And once you're gone, she's bound to take on the role of *eldest* and start ordering me around." Her face scrunched tighter. "More than she does already."

"Don't make that face!" Rosalyn admonished. "You'll get wrinkles."

Cara opened her mouth to reply but was cut off by the sound of their sister's voice calling out, "Caroline and Rosalyn Bernay! What are you doing so close to the cliff?"

"You see?" Cara said pointedly. "It's already started."

Julia approached them with long, purposeful strides, looking every inch a school matron. There was no bonnet falling down her back—it was firmly on her head, her dark brown hair neatly in place under it. "You know Mrs. McHugh told us to keep away from the cliffs," she said as soon as she reached them. "It's dangerous here. You could get hurt." Her dark eyes flashed as she pointed an accusing finger at Cara. "Especially you, with your penchant for daydreaming. You're likely to fall right over the edge."

"I was not aware that daydreaming was a sin," Cara returned with a sniff. "As opposed to, say, anger or hubris."

"Please don't fight today," Rosalyn pleaded, taking both girls by the arm. "It's our last day together. Let's enjoy it." She led them over to a bench that, while far enough from the precipitous drop to appease Julia, still had a stunning view of the wide ocean stretching toward a hazy horizon.

The three of them settled on the bench with Rosalyn in the middle. She was always in the middle, Rosalyn reflected. It seemed her daily task to act as peacemaker between the impulsive Cara, whose head was indeed always in the clouds, and Julia, who found comfort in rules, routine, and clearly defined boundaries. Rosalyn loved them both *because* of their unique temperaments rather than in spite of them. The only thing that troubled her was their tendency to bait one another. Once she was gone, the two of them would have to learn to resolve their differences.

The silence between them stretched although the air was alive with sound. A stiff breeze rustled the grass and played along the hems of their skirts. Below them the waves crashed, and behind

them the joyful screeches of the younger children being “caught” as they played tag were as shrill as the sea gulls crying overhead.

Cara’s gaze had returned to the sea.

“You can watch all day, but it won’t help.” Julia’s voice was flat and unyielding. “He’s not coming back.”

Pain flickered across Cara’s features. “You don’t know that for sure.”

“He’s gone, Cara! Just like our mother. You need to accept that.”

Both girls stiffened as they turned to face one another, tempers rising.

“There’s no point arguing over it,” Rosalyn interposed hastily. “Cara wishes to believe differently than you, Julia. And so long as we don’t know exactly what happened to Papa, I’m not going to fault her for it.”

Julia’s face twisted in a frown, but for once she said nothing.

“Nor do I think *you* should continue to hold these unyielding explanations for Papa’s disappearance,” Rosalyn went on. “Anything might have happened. His ship might have sunk, or he might have succumbed to some tropical disease once he reached the West Indies.”

Cara shook her head impatiently. “You think he’s dead, and Julia thinks he’s abandoned us. Why am I the only one who believes he’s still alive?”

“Because your brain can store nothing but nonsense,” Julia replied.

“None of us knows for sure what happened!” Rosalyn broke in before Cara could retort. “But here’s one thing I do know: We cannot keep dwelling on the past. We must look ahead. Remember Mr. Müller’s admonition that God will always meet our needs.”

“But that’s just it!” Cara jumped on Rosalyn’s words. “Don’t you see? I *need* to know what happened to Papa!” She stood up, lifting her face toward the cloudless sky as she raised her arms



heavenward in a beseeching gesture. "I need to know!" She turned back to her sisters, her eyes bright with tears. "Sometimes I feel like this uncertainty is crushing my heart."

Her expression was so forlorn that she looked exactly as she had all those years ago when the three of them had stared helplessly at the bed where their mother lay dying. That day was sealed in Rosalyn's memory forever.

Even Julia appeared moved by this display of sorrow. She stood up and threw her arms around Cara, squeezing her tightly. "Don't cry," she soothed, stroking Cara's hair. "I'm sorry if I was too harsh. I forget sometimes how much this means to you."

Cara said nothing, but she made no move to pull away. Her breathing steadied, and some of the tension seemed to leave her as she remained in Julia's arms.

After a moment, Julia murmured, "It says in Psalms that when we commit our ways unto the Lord, he will grant us the desires of our heart."

Disengaging herself from Julia's hold, Cara straightened and wiped her eyes. "I should have known you'd quote the Bible at me." But her voice was more teasing than disparaging, and her lips wavered as she attempted a smile. "However, so long as you pick verses like that, I suppose I don't mind."

Julia gave a little smirk, and the two girls hugged each other again. Rosalyn wiped away her own tears as she watched them comforting one another. They would be just fine, the two of them. On some level they understood that each had something vital to impart to the other—something each would be incomplete without.

And Rosalyn? What did she have?

At the moment, she wished only for strength to face the unknown challenges that awaited her.

Reaching into the pocket of her frock, she pulled out the fine

gold watch that had been a gift from their father to their mother. That, along with a faded photograph, were the only mementos they had of him. It seemed fitting, she thought, as she fingered the fine lettering: *To Marie. Oceans can never separate us. Love always, Paul.* They had marked eight years' worth of hours with this watch. Eight years since their mother had died and they had come to Bristol. And, she thought with a touch of bitterness, oceans *had* separated them.

But she was determined not to allow melancholy thoughts to dwell in her soul. She was beginning a new chapter in her life. Wherever she went, she knew that the memories of her parents and the love she shared with her sisters would remain as tangible to her as the watch in her hand.



CHAPTER

1



SIX YEARS LATER  
OCTOBER 1879

**R**OSALYN CROUCHED as low as her sturdy walking gown would allow, hiding behind the hedgerow. When she'd left the orphanage to begin her life as an adult, she'd anticipated some hard times. But never could she have imagined herself in the predicament she faced now.

She held her breath, although she knew it was impossible for him to hear her. The thunder of his approaching carriage, its wheels rattling through the ruts frozen into the road after a week of rain followed by frost, was deafening.

No, it was the sight of her that would bring the carriage to a stop. What would happen if he took her back to Russet Hall to face wrongful accusations of theft—or worse, what she would have to do to buy his silence—she could not allow herself to imagine. Not if she wanted to keep her courage.

Overhead a crow screamed. Startling at the sound, she nearly

fell over into the prickly hedgerow. Worried that any nearby sound would draw attention in her direction, she crouched even lower. The crow flew away, the noise of its call replaced by the blood rushing to her ears as her heart rate increased with every turn of those swiftly approaching carriage wheels.

In seconds the carriage would pass her hiding spot. Shivering from cold and fear, Rosalyn reminded herself that despite how it might look, she now had an advantage of sorts. Mr. Huffman had assumed she was headed for Bainshaw, which had the closest and busiest railway station. However, once his carriage had passed out of sight, she could backtrack to the crossroads and head south toward Linden.

She'd fled the house in the dark gloom just before dawn. It had taken her four hours to reach this point, carrying all she owned in a carpetbag that had grown heavier with each step she'd taken. She'd counted on putting in a good distance before she was discovered missing, thinking no one would look for her before breakfast, but it appeared she'd miscalculated.

With unrelenting speed, the carriage approached. The pounding of hooves and the rattle of the wheels drowned out every other sound. Somehow Rosalyn was able to scrunch down even lower, squeezing her eyes shut—as though by some childish logic he would not see her if she couldn't see him.

The carriage rolled past, not even slowing down. Rosalyn cried out with relief, then clapped a hand over her mouth. She stayed crouched behind the hedgerow for several long, agonizing minutes, listening as the sounds of the carriage gradually receded.

Again she closed her eyes, this time because her heart was flooded with thanksgiving that Mr. Huffman had caught up with her here, when she had only to backtrack a quarter mile or so. In Linden the trains were less frequent, but she decided to take the first one, wherever it led. Once she had broken free of Mr.

Huffman's grasp, she could work her way back to Bristol and the loving safety of her sister Julia, who now worked as a nurse and lived in a respectable boardinghouse.

Julia would know what to do. Julia *always* knew what to do. When they were children, this character trait had manifested time and again as irritating bossiness. But now that they were adults, Rosalyn was glad for her sister's unwavering faith and her uncanny ability to find an answer to even the thorniest problems. And Rosalyn could not think of a worse problem than this.

After a last, wary look in both directions, Rosalyn stood and stretched. One large hurdle seemed to be overcome. But she knew this ordeal was far from over. It had only just begun.

No, that wasn't true, she thought as she took hold of her carpetbag's well-worn handle and began to walk back in the direction she'd come. It had begun the moment her employer, Mrs. Williams, allowed herself to be courted by Mr. Huffman. Still reasonably young at forty, she had fallen in love the moment she'd met the self-confident man who'd made his own fortune in imports and exports. She'd been blind to the darker aspects of his brash nature—things that had become glaringly apparent to everyone else in the household from the day he'd come to live at Russet Hall.

A gentle breeze blew over Rosalyn's face, and the sun eked out a hint of warmth. With no traffic on the roads, the countryside was peaceful again. Birds flew and swooped with gentle calls. Several feet from the road's edge, the dry brown grass rustled as some creature—probably a field mouse—scurried to an unknown destination.

The sun was higher now, although still stingy with its warmth. Even so, Rosalyn found herself wiping sweat from her brow—whether from the exertion of walking or as a reaction to the fear

she'd experienced, she did not know. She only knew that, like the mouse, she was headed for destinations unknown. Unlike the mouse, it was probably going to take a miracle or two to get her there.



Nate Moran jumped nimbly from the open carriage as the driver brought the horses to a stop at the station yard in Winchester. He paused to slap road dust from his red army coat as the other man in the carriage, Colonel Gwynn, stepped down after him. The greying head of Nate's former commander once seemed to contradict his fit and vigorous body, but it was clear the colonel was beginning to feel his age. He stifled a groan as his feet hit the ground and he straightened, perhaps a tad slowly, to his usual ramrod-stiff posture.

Nate eyed him with concern. "Are you really returning to India with the regiment in the spring, sir?"

His question only caused the old colonel to stand even straighter. "Don't you worry. I'm fit as a fiddle. The damp weather gets to my bones, that's all. It will be good to get back to India." He gave Nate a slap on the back. "It will be good to have you with us, too."

Nate nodded, appreciating this vote of confidence. He'd spent the past year in the reserves after an injury had coincided with the end of his seven-year enlistment. But now he was determined to rejoin his regiment and return with them to India. Today he'd taken a real step toward his goal: The colonel had promised to spend a day observing Nate in his reserve company's winter drills at Aldershot in three months' time, shortly after the new year. Nate needed only to prove that his hand had regained the dexterity needed to qualify him for active duty.

Discreetly, he flexed the muscles of his right hand. It was still stiff at times, and certain movements could cause pain. But Nate

was not going to allow these facts to deter him. "I appreciate all you've done for me, sir."

The colonel waved away his thanks. "Purely self-serving. I haven't been able to find a supply sergeant worth his salt since you left."

Nate smiled, knowing this gruff remark was in fact high praise.

"There is one more thing, I believe, that we might need to discuss before you go," the colonel said.

Nate looked at him expectantly. "Yes, sir?"

"Since you've already served a term of seven years, and now that you have—quite rightly—risen to the rank of a non-commissioned officer . . ."

His voice drifted off. Nate could not remember seeing the colonel hesitate like this before.

Gwynn cleared his throat. "In the army, as you know, we are not entirely unaware of matters of the heart, such as they might affect our men."

Nate's gut clenched. Now he knew where this was going.

"There was, I believe, mention of a sweetheart? If you wish to marry and bring your bride with you to India, I will not refuse my permission."

He paused, looking to Nate for a response. Most likely he expected gratitude. Having his commander's permission meant that Nate could be married "on the strength." The army would provide services for his wife and extra pay for him to support her. It was a privilege not granted to everyone. Nate knew, however, that the colonel would not be offering it to him if he knew the truth about how Nate's former "sweetheart" had already affected the regiment.

Nate set his face to an impassive mask, hiding the anger that still filled him at the thought of her. He said evenly, "I thank you, sir, but there is no one." Seeing the colonel's eyebrows lift

in surprise, Nate amended, "What I mean to say is, there is no one *now*."

Gwynn's lined face softened with sympathy. "Was there some calamity—?"

"Nothing like that, sir."

No, the woman in question was alive and well. It was Nate's dream of a future with her that was dead.

Understanding dawned in the older man's eyes. "The ladies can be fickle. But you are young, and there will be time enough for those things. May I offer you a word of advice?"

"Sir?"

"As you are unencumbered, use this opportunity to focus on your career. Given the speed with which you advanced to sergeant, and given your leadership capabilities and the way the other men look up to you . . ." He seemed to be pausing for effect. Nate was trying to follow the man's line of thought, but he was still wrapped up in thoughts of *her*. "Not many enlisted men obtain commissions, but I believe you can join that group of honored few. Once we are established in India again, I think it not unlikely that the rank of second lieutenant might be offered to you."

For a man from the rank and file to become an officer was a rare thing indeed. When Nate had first enlisted, he'd had just such a lofty goal in mind. Things had changed quite a bit since those optimistic early days.

Nate shook his head. "With all due respect, sir, I don't see how you can consider me fit for such an honor."

"Because of what happened in Peshawar? Nonsense. All men make mistakes. It's what they do afterward that shows their true mettle. You fought back the attackers and saved Sergeant Danvers' life. Those are actions befitting an officer."

Gwynn's assessment of the incident—which became the army's official record—placed far more emphasis on Nate's heroism than



on his mistakes. Given Nate's good record and the army's desperate need for men, this decision was understandable. The colonel knew that while Nate had been on guard duty that night, he'd missed critical signs of an enemy attack. But he didn't know that Nate's lapse of attention had been caused by his distress over being jilted via a letter. Fortunately for Nate, the colonel hadn't pressed for details. It had been easier to ascribe the error to the usual causes: fatigue or boredom.

But Nate knew the truth, even if he'd not admitted it to anyone. In his own estimation, he had a long way to go to be worthy of a commission. "Thank you for your good opinion of me, sir."

The sharp old colonel easily recognized Nate's equivocation. "Don't shrug off the idea so quickly," he advised. "Give it more thought. You may see things differently in time. You're a conscientious and loyal soldier, just as your father and grandfather were before you. Think of the honor you would do to their memory, as well as the higher service you could extend to your queen and country."

His commander was perceptive. He knew his reference to the Moran family history would have a special appeal. Nate thought of his grandfather, who had fought Napoleon's army as a mere lad of sixteen. Nate's father, too, had been a soldier, serving honorably in the Crimea. Both men would have been proud to see Nate's rise to a commission. That was something they'd never done, even though each had received honors for bravery. When Nate was a young recruit, he dreamed of becoming an officer. But that was before he learned for himself all the things about life in the army that his father and grandfather had never told him.

Nevertheless, Nate was honor-bound to return and prove himself a worthy soldier. He gave the colonel a curt nod. It was the best he could do.

"Very good. I will say no more for the present."

A train whistle sounded in the distance, signaling the approach of Nate's train.

Gwynn extended a hand. "Good-bye, Moran. We'll see you in January."

The colonel's strong handshake sent a burst of pain up Nate's arm. But Nate held the grip. *The hand is healing*, he told himself. *It's nearly there.*

Ten minutes later, Nate leaned back in his seat as the train pulled out of the station. He let out a tired sigh as he watched the landscape speed by. The day had already been full, but Nate's work wasn't over yet. He'd risen well before dawn in order to complete the most vital of his duties at Jamieson's stable, make this trip, and still be back in London by nightfall. Working at the ostler's—a stable of horses for hire—was enough to fill a man's day, but now Nate was working nights, too. He'd taken his brother's job backstage at a theater to hold the position until his brother's broken leg healed. He could not afford to be late. Not with his family depending on him.

It had been good to see his family again after nearly seven years. Nate was glad, too, that he'd been here to help in their hour of need. Even so, he ached to be away again. It was time to finish what he'd begun in the army and to right the mistakes he'd made.

It was time to leave London, too. He supposed he shouldn't be surprised that Ada chose to marry a prosperous merchant instead of facing an uncertain future with a mere soldier. That didn't mean he wanted to spend week after week seeing her happily ensconced on the arm of another man. Nor could he forgive her for the manner in which she had jilted him, and for her letter's disastrous consequences. She had come through the experience unscathed, but Nate's life would never be the same.

He crossed his arms and tried to settle into the most comfortable position he could find. The train ride would give him time

for a nap, and he knew he'd better take it if he wanted to keep his wits about him tonight. The last thing he needed was to injure himself because he'd wasted good sleep in agitation over the past. Nate was pretty sure he'd get more sleep if—no, *when*—he returned to the army.



The town clock was tolling four when Rosalyn walked into Linden. She sent furtive glances toward the people around her as she made her way up the main street to the railway station. She had not been a frequent visitor to this town, so she had no real reason to worry she'd be recognized. Even so, every one of her senses remained on high alert.

The railway station was busy. Sidestepping a young boy trying unsuccessfully to lead a very large dog, Rosalyn made her way to the ticket booth. The clerk sitting behind the iron grill was an older gentleman. His gaze skimmed past her, perhaps looking for her male escort. Realizing she was alone, his eyes returned to settle on her. "Where to, miss?"

"When is the next train to Bristol?"

He checked the schedule on the wall next to him. "Seven o'clock."

Rosalyn looked toward the station gate as she considered the potential hazards of waiting here for three hours. Down the road she saw a puff of dust rising. There was no reason to suppose it was Mr. Huffman, of course, and yet she kept staring, straining her eyes as she waited for the vehicle to crest the rise.

Moments later, Mr. Huffman's carriage came into view. She also—thankfully—heard the whistle of an approaching train.

"What train is that?" she asked the clerk.

He frowned. "You don't want that one if you're going north. It's going south—bound for London."

"I'll take it," she said, pulling money from her reticule.

This would work. It *had* to work. Surely she had not gone through all this for nothing.

She took the ticket and turned away from the booth. As she set off for the crowded platform, Rosalyn kept her back to the station entrance. She sidled up to a group of two men and three women standing together, chatting excitedly about the things they were going to see when they got to London. Rosalyn did her best to blend in, to appear as though she were traveling with them.

The train came to a stop, its brakes squealing, smoke and steam pouring out in all directions.

"Miss Bernay! MISS BERNAY!" The imperious voice of her former employer carried across the crowded platform. Rosalyn did not turn, hoping he would think himself mistaken.

"MISS BERNAY! Come here!"

Why was he not advancing toward her? She risked a glance in his direction. He had been stopped by a burly gate attendant. Mr. Huffman gestured, pointing at her, but the guard held his ground. He directed Mr. Huffman toward the ticket counter, clearly telling him he must buy his own ticket before he could access the platform.

Rosalyn waited impatiently as a large family with several toddlers and seemingly endless baskets and bundles exited the railway car before she could enter it. When the carriage door was clear, Rosalyn ran up the two steps and inside.

She took a seat by a window facing the train platform, unable to look away. Surely Mr. Huffman would not attempt to drag her off the train? Did he have the authority to do so? Would anyone here listen to him?

She waited anxiously as seconds ticked away. It seemed as though time itself was suspended, the large hand on the station

clock refusing to move. Yet inexplicably, he did not reappear at the gate. Had he given up that easily?

In a moment, she was able to guess the reason for his delay. An elderly couple, moving very slowly, hobbled through the gate. Perhaps they'd been at the ticket counter, holding up Mr. Huffman's ability to buy a ticket. The train whistle blew. It was about to leave. Rosalyn's heart leapt with joy at the sound.

The platform guard hurried forward to help the elderly couple onto the train, closing the door sharply behind them just as the train began to pull forward. Rosalyn craned her neck as the train gathered speed to keep the platform in view for as long as she could. She had just enough time to see a frustrated Mr. Huffman race onto the platform before the train left him and the station far behind.

As the countryside became a blur, Rosalyn pulled her gaze away and looked down, surprised to see that her hands were trembling. She took several slow, deep breaths, trying to get her heart rate and her breathing back to normal. After hours of walking a knife's edge, relief washed through her. For better or worse, she was on her way to London.