

TRACIE PETERSON

Ladies of the Lake

*Destined
for You*



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Chapter 1

Duluth, Minnesota
September 1869

Gloriana Womack was not one to brook nonsense. If her twenty-five years had taught her anything, it was that eight-year-old boys were constantly in motion. And that motion often took them to places that guaranteed the need for a bath. But with the school bell set to ring in less than ten minutes, Gloriana barely had time to get her brother, JT, into a clean shirt.

“I told you not to go outside until it was time to leave for school.”

“Aw, Glory. I just wanted to see if Papa was still here.” The curly-headed boy let her dress him but kept straining to see out the window.

“Papa told you he’d be back to walk you to school. He’s not going to leave before he does that. Remember, he’s not fishing today. He has business to tend to.”

“I don’t know why I have to go to school anyway. When I get big, I’m gonna catch fish like Papa does. He didn’t go to school.”

“Which is exactly why he wants you to. There are a lot of things that are limited for Papa because he didn’t get an education. Even taking care of bank business requires someone to go with him. Mama used to read for him, but now I do it.”

“Mr. Carson went with him today,” JT said.

“Yes, he did. Mr. Carson is very helpful in these things.” She had nothing but fond thoughts for the sweet young couple next door. Scott and Sally Carson had become like family.

Gloriana finished the last button on her brother’s shirt and had just straightened when their father bounded into the house with a grin.

“There’s my family. Are you ready, JT?”

The boy shoved his shirt into his waistband and pulled up his suspender straps. “I am now. Come on, or the bell is going to ring and I’ll be late. Don’t forget we have to get all the way up the hill.” JT gave Gloriana a hug, then went running to his father, who bent over just as the boy approached. JT jumped on his back and gave a whooping cry. “To school!”

Gloriana laughed. JT had more energy than any other boys she knew. “Be good, JT.” She handed her father a cloth bag with the drawstring pulled tight. “Here’s his lunch.”

With the men of the house gone, Gloriana began her daily routine of housework. She threw JT’s dirty shirt into the pile of laundry she would have to tackle later. For now, she would get the breakfast mess cleaned up. They’d had flapjacks, and it seemed JT had tracked stickiness everywhere.

She took a dish towel that was already damp and dipped it in a pan of hot water that she’d readied for the dishes. The table, a hardy pine creation that had been gifted to her mother and father when they married, was soon decluttered and cleaned to

Gloriana's standards. She finished tidying up the kitchen and then went to work on the dishes. When everything was finally washed, dried, and put away, she stood back and surveyed her handiwork. Nothing was quite so satisfying as a clean kitchen.

Now to mop.

A knock interrupted her plan. Gloriana dried her hands on her apron and untied the strings. She hung it up on a peg by the back door and went to receive her guest.

A petite brunette stood on the other side of the door. Gloriana smiled.

"I figured since Papa and Scott got back from town, you would be busy with your husband," Gloriana said.

Sally Carson patted her ever-rounding belly. "The baby has other plans. I've been having some pains."

"Is it time?" Gloriana asked, alarmed.

Sally shook her head. "The midwife said it's false labor, but the real thing will come soon enough. Scott is busy trying to make sure everything is ready. He's making some repairs to the house that he and your father talked about. I just came over to borrow some white thread. I'm finishing up the last few diapers."

"Of course. Come in and have a seat. Don't wear yourself out." Gloriana went to her sewing basket. "It's going to be so much fun to have a baby around. I remember when JT was born. Actually, I remember when Tabby and Aaron were born as well, but that seems like a long time ago now." For a moment Gloriana found herself thinking back to those happier days when the family had all been together. Before sickness had robbed her of a mother and two siblings.

“How long has it been since . . . well, since they . . .” Sally let her voice fade to silence.

Gloriana returned with a spool of white thread. “Three years since Mama and Aaron and Tabitha died from scarlet fever. It seems like forever at times, and other days it feels like it was just last week.”

“I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to bring up painful thoughts.”

Gloriana dropped into her father’s chair by the fireplace. “You didn’t bring up anything that wasn’t already there. I miss them so much that they are never far from my thoughts.”

“I wish I could have been here for you. You’ve been such a dear friend to me since Scott and I arrived last spring. I don’t know what we would have done if you weren’t here. Why, we wouldn’t even have a place to live if not for your father renting us the little house next door.”

“Papa is that way. Always so generous and kind. I think your arrival helped him as much as it did me. I think we were both lost in our sadness.” Gloriana tried not to think about how much she missed her family. Scarlet fever had come like a thief without warning. Only a handful of the families who lived nearby had suffered from the sickness. Everyone else had recovered, but not the Womack family. The doctor said their cases had been more severe.

Gloriana pushed aside the memories. “Papa said Scott ordered a new rug. That will be so nice for the baby.”

“For me too. I get so cold. When the wind comes down from the north, I just about freeze.”

“And you haven’t even experienced winter yet. You’ll appreciate the extra effort the men put into getting the firewood stocked up. Having it stacked around the outside of the house

adds extra insulation and makes it easy to bring inside. We'll get by just fine. You'll see."

"I do worry about Scott." Sally shook her head. "He works so hard."

"Yes, but when the harbor closes in January, he'll be here with you and the baby. There's still work to be done, making repairs and getting ready for the next fishing season, but having the men home is always nice."

"But the storms between now and January are yet to be endured. I've heard so many horrible stories."

Gloriana nodded and reached out to pat Sally's hand in reassurance. "They are bad, to be sure, but being afraid won't change things."

"I know, but just seeing some of the storms this summer was enough. I don't like to think of what's to come. How can a person live through such things?"

Gloriana wished she could say something comforting, but she knew as well as every other person in town that Lake Superior was extremely unforgiving at times. Papa said the lake was like a wild animal. You could never hope to tame it, and to ignore it could easily spell your doom.

"Sally, just remember that God is in charge, and He knows the lake because He created it. We can trust Him to watch over us and guard us."

"Yes, but people die out there all the time."

"They do, but you can't live your life in fear. People die logging the woods. People die from sickness, like my mama and brother and sister."

"Or in childbirth," Sally murmured.

"Goodness, just listen to how morose we've managed to get.

This is a beautiful day, and you are soon to deliver a much-desired baby. We need to think on that and other good things.”

“I know you’re right. I need to get back home. Do you still want us to come for supper at five?”

“Yes. Papa wants to get to bed early so he can get out on the lake early. At least they’re sticking close and just heading over to the Apostle Islands. He said they’d haul in whatever the pound nets have caught and then take up the nets before the weather turns bad. We always retrieve them before October.”

Sally nodded and squared her shoulders, as if determining to be brave. “I know they’ll have their hands full. Oh, I almost forgot. Could I borrow some cinnamon too? I want to make the men some cookies to have as a snack tomorrow.” She scooted to the edge of the seat and struggled to her feet.

“Of course.” Gloriana went to the kitchen and pulled out a drawer in her spice container. She pulled a stick of cinnamon from a small glass jar. “Here you go.”

“Thanks, Gloriana. You always make me feel so much better.” Sally’s large brown eyes were edged with tears. “I don’t mean to always be so afraid, but our life has been rough. Since my mother died, I don’t know what I would have done without Scott. I had nobody else.”

“Well, you have us now.” Gloriana hugged her friend close, as she might have done JT. “Now, try to enjoy the day.”

“I will. I promise.”



Gloriana had a few minutes to herself before JT returned home from school. Papa was off seeing to something for the boat, and the house was clean and supper was already baking in

the oven. She settled down at the kitchen table with her Bible and had just started to read when another knock sounded on the front door. It was unusual to have more than one visitor in a day. With a sigh, Gloriana closed the Bible and went to see who it was.

“Mr. Nelson,” she said, surprised to see the schoolmaster. Beside him, a downcast JT stood digging his toe in the dirt.

“Miss Womack, is your father home?” The severe-looking man had been the subject of many of her brother Aaron’s pantomimes, and the cause of the utter desolation of JT.

“I’m afraid you’ll have to deal with me for the time being.”

JT looked up with a pleading expression. Gloriana could only imagine his crime.

“Jeremiah Thomas carved his initials on his school desk, and I have come to deliver him home for punishment from his father. I have already delivered three well-placed swats and commanded that he repair the damage immediately.”

“JT, is this true?” Gloriana asked in as stern a voice as she could muster.

“It’s true. He swatted me real hard,” JT confirmed.

“I meant did you carve on the desk.”

He nodded, then looked at the ground again. “I’m sorry.”

Mr. Nelson pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose. “Unfortunately, I believe your brother is only sorrowful for getting caught.”

“I will see that our father learns of what happened. I’m sure JT will be happy to repair the desk.”

Mr. Nelson looked at her for a long moment. “Very well. I shall leave him to your care.”

He turned with the precision of a soldier and marched away.

Gloriana might have laughed at his formality but for JT. The boy would see her amusement as something to capitalize on. Already she could see him relax his shoulders as he gave a sigh.

“I’ll have your pocketknife,” she said.

“Mr. Nelson took it. Mean old bear.”

“JT, that is not to be tolerated. Mr. Nelson is your elder and teacher. He is your authority at school, and you have dishonored yourself today.”

Her brother’s lower lip jutted out and quivered. Tears were soon to follow.

Gloriana gave him a brief hug. “Go to your room and wait for Papa.”

JT said nothing more but hung his head and moved toward his bedroom. Part of her wanted to run after him and tell him everything was forgiven and there would be no further punishment, but another part knew he’d never learn if he didn’t have to face the consequences of his actions. It was just so hard to be an eight-year-old boy in a world full of rules.



Norman Womack looked at his son and shook his head. “I’m very disappointed in you, JT. What got into your head that made you think it was all right to destroy someone else’s property?”

“I don’t know.” JT kept his gaze on the floor. “I guess I didn’t think.”

“No. You sure didn’t. I can’t understand what got into you. I’m disappointed, son. Very disappointed.”

JT bit his lower lip and braved a glance at his father’s face. Gloriana wanted to step in and save her brother from further pain and discomfort, but Papa had made it clear after Mama

died that Gloriana could no longer play the role of sympathetic sister. She would be JT's disciplinarian in their father's absence, and it was crucial that she understood how important that role was. Children without discipline grew up to believe they could do whatever they wanted. Papa had told her that it wasn't easy to be so firm with JT, but it might very well keep him from making bad choices in the future. Gloriana knew her father's words were true, but she hated seeing JT so upset.

"So what do you have to say for yourself, Jeremiah Thomas?"

JT knew that when his full name was used, there was severe punishment coming his way. "I don't know. I didn't mean to hurt the desk, but when I started, it was just fun and I couldn't stop."

"Did you know what you were doing was wrong?"

JT nodded. "Yes, sir."

"There will be other times in life when you might get involved in something that you find fun but know is wrong. You have to fight against those kinds of wrongdoing. They will not only cause you a world of problems but may hurt others as well, like Mr. Nelson."

"Mr. Nelson is mean. I hate him!" JT's expression showed he had surprised himself by making such a strong statement. He wasn't usually one to sass or speak against other people.

"I don't much care if you like him or not. Each man makes his own judgment about such things," Papa declared. "What I do care about is you speakin' your mind when I'm reprimanding you. That will get you a more severe punishment."

JT frowned and fixed his father with a spiteful look. "Then I hate you too."

Gloriana made a move toward her brother, but Papa waved

her off. “That is your choice, JT, just as it’s my choice to deny you supper. Furthermore, you will not only sand and paint your desk but every desk in that classroom.”

“That’s not fair! I didn’t carve on those other desks.”

“You keep sassin’ me, and I’ll have to spank you as well. Now, go to your room and get ready for bed.”

JT’s face reddened, but he didn’t say another word. He stormed off to the back of the house and slammed his bedroom door.

“I’ve never seen him like that.” Gloriana looked at her father. “What’s gotten into him?”

“Hard to tell. Boys can be like that.” He shook his head. “You can’t hold it against him, Glory. He’s let his anger get the best of him. I’ll go talk to him about it later. He’s not gonna be able to sleep for some time. He knows what he did was wrong—at school and here at home. It’ll get to eatin’ at his heart, and he’ll be filled with remorse. It might take time for him to admit it, but eventually he’ll be sorry for what he’s said and done.”

That evening, just before Papa went to bed, Gloriana heard him talking to her brother once again. She stood outside the door, hoping and praying that all would be resolved. She certainly didn’t want Papa leaving without JT apologizing.

But the boy stood firm in his anger. He reiterated that he hated his papa. It was something Gloriana had never heard come out of his mouth. She knew the last few years had been hard on him. Losing their mother had taken joy from all of them. In fact, Gloriana found little joy left in her heart. She hurt at the thought of their loss and couldn’t imagine how it must be for a little boy to be without his mother and siblings. He had adored Aaron, who at sixteen surprisingly always found time

to play with JT. Tabitha treated JT like her own baby. She had been five when JT came into the world, and she was always at his side. Was all of JT's anger due to that loss?

Gloriana heard her father tell JT good night and reassure him that he was loved despite his wrongdoing. JT said nothing, and Gloriana wanted to go to his bedside and demand he make up with Papa. She was a firm believer in not letting the sun go down on one's anger.

She eased away from the room as her father came out. She gave him a sympathetic shrug, having no idea what else she could do. Papa followed her out to the front room.

"Give him time," he said. "He'll come around."

"I just want to shake him. I'm so troubled by his attitude."

Papa smiled. "You can't let it get you all caught up. Children say things without thinkin', and once he thinks it through, he's going to feel powerfully bad about it. We'll show him forgiveness, though."

"And what about the punishment?"

"That stands. A person must bear the consequences of their actions, or they learn nothin'."

"But there's always the possibility of grace."

Papa gave her a hard look. "Do you think the punishment was too severe?"

"I'm sure I wouldn't know." Gloriana gave a sigh. "I trust your judgment, Papa. I didn't mean to sound like I didn't."

He smiled. "Don't fret. I'll lend a hand in due time and see that those desks get fixed up, but first JT has to accept his punishment and show a willingness to obey."

Gloriana nodded and stretched up on tiptoe to kiss her father's cheek. "I love you, Papa."

“And I love you, Glory. You look more like your mama every day, with your pretty blond curls just like hers and those bright blue eyes. It was her eyes that caught my attention the first time I saw her. Never saw eyes that color of blue.”

His expression took on a distant look, and Gloriana clearly saw regret in his eyes. It was regret that matched her soul. Regret over a loss that could never be changed.