

SIGNET • 451-AE6101 • (CANADA \$3.95) • U.S. \$3.50



SIGNET REGENCY ROMANCE

A timid beauty's heart races for London's most handsome lord

NEWMARKET MATCH

ANITA MILLS



THE STAR STALLION

“There he is!” Richard breathed triumphantly, holding the lantern up to illuminate quite the shiniest, sleekest chestnut stallion that Harriet had ever seen. The horse sidestepped around within the narrow confines of the stall, affording her an even better view.

Harriet’s gaze moved eagerly over its sleek, muscular body to the white stockings of its forelegs.

“He—he’s perfect, Richard—he is,” she said.

But what Harriet could not say, dared not say, was that her fellow owner of this magnificent animal, her long-ago childhood companion, her splendidly handsome and dazzlingly sophisticated step-cousin Lord Richard Stanton, was perfect as well—perfect for her. . .

Anita Mills lives in Kansas City, Missouri, with her husband, four children, and seven cats in a restored turn-of-the-century house. A former English and history teacher, she has turned a lifelong passion for both into a writing career.

TALES OF THE HEART

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--|-----------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | DAUNTLESS MISS WINGRAVE by Amanda Scott | (161459—\$3.50) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | MOONLIGHT MASQUERADE by Michelle Kasey | (161025—\$3.50) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | THE INVINCIBLE VISCOUNT by Irene Saunders | (161033—\$3.50) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | CAPTAIN BLACK by Elizabeth Hewitt | (161041—\$3.50) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | A SPORTING PROPOSITION by Elizabeth Hewitt | (161068—\$3.50) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | A DISHONORABLE PROPOSAL by Katherine Kingsley | (160584—\$3.50) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | THE PLAYER KNIGHT by Ellen Fitzgerald | (160592—\$3.50) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | MISS CHARTLEY'S GUIDED TOUR by Carla Kelly | (160606—\$3.50) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | THE SERGEANT MAJOR'S DAUGHTER by Sheila Walsh | (160614—\$3.50) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | A MASKED DECEPTION by Mary Balogh | (160622—\$3.50) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | THE NOTORIOUS NABOB by Sheila Walsh | (160002—\$3.50) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | WILLOWSWOOD MATCH by Gayle Buck | (160010—\$3.50) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | LADY SARA'S SCHEME by Emily Hendrickson | (160029—\$3.50) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | MAD MASQUERADE by Barbara Hazard | (160037—\$3.50) |

Prices slightly higher in Canada

Buy them at your local bookstore or use this convenient coupon for ordering.

NEW AMERICAN LIBRARY

P.O. Box 999, Bergenfield, New Jersey 07621

Please send me the books I have checked above. I am enclosing \$_____ (please add \$1.00 to this order to cover postage and handling). Send check or money order—no cash or C.O.D.'s. Prices and numbers are subject to change without notice.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Allow 4-6 weeks for delivery.

This offer is subject to withdrawal without notice.

Newmarket Match

Anita Mills



A SIGNET BOOK

NEW AMERICAN LIBRARY

A DIVISION OF PENGUIN BOOKS USA INC.

NAL BOOKS ARE AVAILABLE AT QUANTITY DISCOUNTS WHEN USED TO PROMOTE PRODUCTS OR SERVICES. FOR INFORMATION PLEASE WRITE TO PREMIUM MARKETING DIVISION, NEW AMERICAN LIBRARY, 1633 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10019.

Copyright © 1989 by Anita Mills

All rights reserved



SIGNET TRADEMARK REG. U.S.PAT. OFF. AND FOREIGN COUNTRIES
REGISTERED TRADEMARK—MARCA RREGISTRADA
HECHO EN DRESDEN, TN., U.S.A.

SIGNET, SIGNET CLASSIC, MENTOR, ONYX, PLUME, MERIDIAN and NAL BOOKS are published by New American Library, a division of Penguin Books USA Inc., 1633 Broadway, New York, New York 10019

First Printing, October, 1989

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

1 "No! A racehorse! Bah! My only regret, Richard, is that in another two months I shall no longer be able to control your wild starts!"

"Another two months is too late!"

The young woman in the library shifted the kitten on her lap and turned a page in the book she was attempting to read. But her attention was caught by the argument coming from her father's study, and she could not help straining to hear more of it. That it was her step-cousin Richard, Viscount Sherborne, made her even more curious, for despite the restraints put on his purse by the trustees of his fortune, he lived the fashionable life of her dreams. Yes, Richard Standen was a veritable Corinthian by anyone's standards, and within a short space of time he was going to be an extremely wealthy one. Moreover, he was quite her favorite relative, blood or otherwise.

But her clutch-fisted father was not going to part with so much as a farthing over Richard's stipulated allowance, was not going to relinquish even the slightest control of the Standen fortune a day before the terms of Henry Standen's will forced him to do so. And Richard ought to have known he wasted his breath in arguing the point.

"But it isn't just any racehorse, Uncle," she heard

her step-cousin explain. "'Tis a natural, I tell you! I have seen it run, and there's none to compare for power and grace! 'Tis a certain winner!"

"Humph! It's in the blood, I suppose," her father snorted. "Aye, if your father'd not been hell-born himself and broken his neck for a stupid wager before he was ruined, I doubt he'd have left you a tuppence to squander! There it is—I've said it! You are no less a scapegrace than he was!"

"It's my money, Uncle," Richard reminded him evenly, his voice dropping with what she could only consider admirable restraint.

"Not for another two months!"

Harriet Rowe could see in her mind how his jaw must be working to hold what he could of his Standen temper. Completely cuaght up in the contretemps in the study, she closed the book and leaned forward, stroking the sleeping kitten absently. Surely Richard must know there was no budging her father—how well she could tell him that.

"I could make a bloody fortune with that horse, Uncle John," the younger man pleaded. "You have not seen it—at least come look before you deny me."

"My mind is set, I tell you! The answer is no! And when all's said and done—when your salad days are behind you—you will thank me for it," Sir John sniffed sanctimoniously.

In her chair, Harriet mouthed the words even as he said them, for she'd had years of listening to just such lectures. Indeed, she'd been treated to one but yesterday when she'd timidly ventured to suggest that she leave the misery of his house to set up a quiet establishment with her old nurse, Miss Violet Plimly, and Plimly's elderly sister Agnes in Bath.

"Bath!" he'd howled, as though Bath were some hotbed of license and indecency. "No, missy, you

will not! If you were fool enough to remain unwed, you are scarce fit to fend for yourself out in the world! How should it appear before the world, I ask you, if 'twere known you had left your father's protection? No, missy—'twill not serve!"

And not even the reminder that she had her own competency had moved him. Quite the contrary, in fact, for it brought home to him again that her late mother had been remiss by allowing a female child an inheritance ungoverned by her father or any other responsible male upon her majority.

"As to that, missy, I can only say I'll not allow you to waste your competence! An establishment of your own! No! Rather than thinking of such a thing, you should be asking my advice about investing in the funds!" And then he'd ended with his usual lecture. "Aye, when you are naught but an aged spinster in this house, you will thank me for the care I have given you, Harriet, though I must admit 'tis a sorrow to me that you have set yourself against the married state. Hannah cannot quite like it, you know—two grown females in the same household is like oil and water, after all, and they do not set well together."

The care he had given her. 'Twas a jest at best, she thought rebelliously. All he'd done after her mother's death was to remarry a widow as cold as he was, and between them they'd made it plain from the very beginning that a female child was naught but a burden. They'd put no expense into a Season for her, Hannah sniffing 'twould be but money wasted, for Harriet was too shy to take. And it was true, Harriet supposed, for the thought of parading about on the Marriage Mart had terrified her. But they'd expected her to take the vicar's second son, a singularly pompous, stolid man who positively hated cats. And when she'd refused his suit, they'd

punished her in a dozen ways, making it plain they begrudged her very presence, calling her naught but a spinster repeatedly, and yet denying her any escape but marriage. It was no wonder that her only brother had bought a commission and fled from the dreary life at Rowe's Hill.

The door to her father's study opened, and she could hear her step-cousin gathering his hat and stick from a footman. Impulsively she dumped the kitten gently to the floor and slipped out into the hall as he disappeared out the front door. She raced for the back door and sped around the house, holding her skirts decorously above her slippers.

"Psssst! Richard!" she hissed from around the corner.

He'd been about to mount the step of his curricule when he heard her. He hesitated, his face betraying his anger and his impatience. Clearly he was in no mood for the merest pleasantry with anyone.

"Over here!" She tried to keep her voice low enough not to draw her father's attention.

Richard turned around, ready to give whoever it was a sharp set-down, and then he saw her. And for once there was a certain mischief in those dark eyes of hers that reminded him of another time, a time when they'd been children together, shortly after his aunt's marriage to her father. She'd been a lively girl once, but that was before years of his Aunt Hannah's sober strictures and cold dislike had taken their toll. Now she'd become a quiet, timid woman, one who'd failed in the expected quest of a husband. And at twenty-four she was but a spinster on the proverbial shelf, doomed to remain in her father's house under his Aunt Hannah's dominance. He felt a surge of pity for her, and yet he could not entirely forget his anger.

"What is it, Harry? I've scarce got time—" Her

face fell, and he relented. "All right. I suppose I am not in such a hurry as all that."

"Shhhhhh." She beckoned to him from the corner of the house. "I heard the quarrel with my father, Richard," she told him as he came closer. "I could not help it."

"I'll wager the whole household did," he muttered dryly.

"Is it truly a wonderful horse?"

He was about to retort that it didn't make any difference now, that it was going to be someone else's horse anyway, but there was an eagerness, an almost childlike intensity in those dark, appealing eyes. "Yes," he answered simply. "Yes, it is."

"What color is it?"

"What difference does that make?" he snapped, his irritation returning. "Color doesn't have anything to do with how well a horse runs, Harry."

"I just wanted to know if it were pretty."

The wistfulness in her voice was unmistakable. Reminding himself that it was not her fault her father was so obstinate, he unbent again. "It's a chestnut—and yes, it's a very handsome animal. Does that satisfy you?" he asked more gently.

"And you are certain it can run—can compete, I mean?"

"Harry, with a little training, this horse could win at Newmarket—or anywhere. He's a two-year-old thoroughbred—a direct descendant of the Godolphin Barb." He walked around the house, drawing her out of view of anyone else, warming to the subject of the horse he wanted desperately. "'Tis difficult to believe, I know, but the man who owns him is quite elderly and has no interest in racing him."

"But if 'tis such a wonderful animal, why does

he offer it to you?" she questioned reasonably. "You have not the least experience with a racehorse, have you?"

"No, Harry, I do not, but 'tis unimportant—there are trainers for that sort of thing. Hawleigh has some affection for me—he's an old bachelor with no close heirs. Anyway, I have listened to his stories for years, out of politeness mostly, but I guess he did not see it quite that way. Then when I saw this colt of his and thought it had prospects, I made mention of it to him, and he told me then I should have the first opportunity should he decide to sell."

"And now he wishes to sell it?"

"His health fails him, and he has not the inclination anymore."

"I see."

"No, you cannot, I fear." He sighed, recalling again the horse he wanted so badly. "Well, now that 'tis old enough to race as a colt this year, I *know* 'tis the best animal I have ever been privileged to see. It has the speed of the wind, Harry, and the old man doesn't wish the bother of racing him."

"I see," she murmured again, looking up at her handsome step-cousin, taking in the rakish set of his hat, the slight curl of his black hair around his face, his bright blue eyes, his strong, straight features, the faint curve of his mouth. Richard Standen had been the ideal of her youth, the one who dared do things she only dreamed of.

"Anything else, Harry?" he asked, eager to leave Rowe's Hill and his uncle's ignominious refusal behind him.

"Yes." She cleared her throat nervously, her heart thudding at the daring thought that came to mind. "How much does the horse cost?"

"What difference does it make?" He sighed heavily again, looking away, squinting his eyes

against the winter sun. "My pockets are let to quarter day, and there's another buyer. If Uncle William had not died last year, I daresay he'd have let me have my money, but now that your father is the only trustee . . . I should have sold something, but now 'tis too late. Old Hawleigh wanted to give me the first chance, that's all—he knows I'd take care of his horse and not push the animal too hard and ruin it."

"But how much would it take—to buy it, I mean?" she persisted.

"That's the thing of it, Harry. Hawleigh would have let me have him for only a thousand pounds. For any other, 'tis more than twice that much."

A thousand pounds. She gulped at the seeming enormity of the sum. "One thous . . . *one thousand pounds*, Richard?"

"I know, it sounds like a lot, but a good racehorse is worth a lot more than that. The stud fees alone can reach three hundred fifty pounds once he's retired. And that's not counting the purses—in a single season, a horse can run at Newmarket, Doncaster, Epsom, and a lot of the smaller tracks—not to mention on the Continent."

"I see." Her mind racing with her heart now, she moved in front of him and reached to touch one of the layered capes of his greatcoat where it hung over his arm. "Then a horse would be an investment, wouldn't it?"

"I wish Uncle John could see it as clearly as that. Yes, a horse like that would be an excellent investment, Harry. 'Tis what I was trying to tell him. And it wasn't as though I wanted *him* to buy it," he muttered with feeling. "I did but ask for what is going to be mine in a matter of weeks anyway, you know."

One thousand pounds. Harriet sucked in her

breath and let it out in a rush, both afraid and exhilarated by what she meant to do. "I should like to invest in your horse, Richard," she managed, her fingers tightening convulsively on the heavy woolen cloth, tugging it.

At first he didn't think he'd heard her right, but as he stared down into her upturned face, he realized she was indeed serious. "*You*, Harry?"

"Well, why not?" The words, once they came, tumbled out excitedly. "Papa is always urging me to invest the competence Mama left me, and—"

"I couldn't take your money," he cut in gently. "I'd not ask it of you."

"But if you think the horse is going to be a winner—"

"I wouldn't feel right about it, Harry. Things can happen—even to the best plans. I wouldn't want to risk your money."

"Fiddle. I want to do it." Her dark eyes met his, sobering, and she nodded. "You don't understand—I *want* to do it. I never do anything the least extraordinary, Richard, and I think owning a race-horse would be wonderful."

"No. You cannot have that much to risk."

"I have exactly two thousand pounds, so I shall not be destitute anyway, and besides, I should expect you to pay half of it back when you come into your inheritance. And I should expect to share in your winnings, after all."

"Uncle John—"

"My father doesn't control my inheritance, Richard. I think Mama realized how it would be before she died. I had my brother place it in a bank in London before he left."

"George—"

"No. Not my brother either. When I reached twenty-one, I gained full disposal of it."

He looked down, taking in the plain knot of brown hair at the nape of her neck, the almost shapeless blue gown she wore, and he resolutely backed away. "You should spend your money on yourself, Harry."

"As if I ever go anywhere or do anything!" she snorted in disgust. "No, my mind is quite made up, I think—I should like to own at least half of a race-horse."

Later, he was to blame it on the temptation of the horse, but just then he read the eagerness, the spirit, the enthusiasm shining in those dark eyes, something he had not seen in a number of years, and he could not refuse her offer.

"I'll pay all of it back, Harry."

"I told you—I wish to be a partner in the venture, Richard. You pay me five hundred pounds and half of anything the horse wins."

An impish, delighted smile spread over her usually somber face, reassuring him that she did indeed want to lend him the money. He held out his hand as he would have to another man, and she took it. "Then partners we are, Harry. But if you ever decide you wish to cash in, you have but to tell me, and I will repay you every pound, I promise you."

"No. It is enough to share an adventure with you. And besides"—the dimples at the corners of her mouth deepened—"it is just possible that your horse will make me rich, isn't it?"

Her smile was infectious. His humor restored completely, he grinned back at her. "And if he does not?"

"He will—I know it."

Still holding her hand, Richard leaned over and brushed a brotherly kiss against her cheek. "You know, Harry, I always did think you were a very good sort of a girl."

"What fustian!" she retorted, blushing to the roots of her soft brown hair. "You teased me unmercifully—and you know it. And you were forever getting me into your scrapes, too." She pulled her hand away and stepped back self-consciously. "Yes, well . . . I shall give you a draft on my bank in London, if 'tis settled. And then you'd best be going before Papa suspects what I have done."

2 Harriet drew her legs up under her skirts and held Richard's letter closer to the faint winter's light coming through the windowpane. Two Harry? She stopped and read the line again—he'd named their horse Two Harry, he said, to reflect their joint ownership. Two Harry for Harriet Rowe and Richard Henry Thomas Standen. She chuckled, delighted by that small recognition of her contribution, and wondered if the name would give her away. No, she decided, casting a surreptitious look at her father as he read his paper across the room. No, he lacked the imagination to ever see any connection.

Sir John Rowe looked up and frowned. "If you must display your unseemly levity, I would that you went somewhere else, Harriet."

"Well, I for one cannot think what my nephew could possibly want to write to her," Hannah Rowe murmured as she continued to stitch along the border of a table runner.

"Your nevvvy? Here now, miss, I'll not have you setting your cap for the likes of Sherborne—you hear me? The Standens may be plump in the pocket, but they're a havey-cavey bunch. Besides, stands to reason he'd want better'n a baron's daughter, anyway."

"Papa!"

"Humph! As if she'd have the chance!" Hannah sniffed. "With his looks and fortune, he can expect an Incomparable."

"And if half the stories I've heard are true, he'll be in dun territory within a year! Rich as Croesus, but the blood's bad!" He cast a quick look at his wife's stiffening expression and hastened to add, "Not on your side, my dear—'twas the Standens I meant." Then he turned his full attention on his daughter, demanding sternly, "Just what does Sherborne write?"

Caught by her father's bushy-browed stare, Harriet cast about wildly in her mind for a plausible explanation, particularly since Richard was not in the habit of writing to her. At that moment the kitten in her lap reached playfully to bat at the paper she held. She looked down.

"Oh . . . uh . . . a kitten."

Hannah Rowe's eyebrow rose skeptically as she eyed her stepdaughter curiously. "What?"

"That is, he would like to have a kitten."

"Nonsense! 'Tis plain as a pikestaff, Harriet, that you have inherited your own mama's silliness," Sir John complained. "A cat indeed!"

"If Richard writes that he wants a cat, it must surely be his notion of a jest."

Thus attacked, Harriet felt compelled to stand her ground, however tenuous it might be. "Oh, no—he does."

"Do you mean to tell me that Sherborne is actually asking for a *cat*? I cannot credit it, missy! What queer start is this?"

For a moment Harriet feared he was going to demand to read Richard's letter for himself, but then Hannah nodded. "Well, I suppose that does