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Enjoy a sneak peek at Valerie Hansen's adventurous historical-romance novel RESCUING THE HEIRESS, available February, only from Love Inspired Historical

“I think your profession is most honorable.”

One more quick glance showed him that Tess was smiling, and it was all he could do to keep from breaking into a face-splitting grin at her praise. There was something impish yet charming about the banker's daughter. Always had been, if he were totally honest with himself.

Someday, Michael vowed silently, he would find a suitable woman with a spirit like Tess's and give her a proper courting. He had no chance with Tess herself, of course. That went without saying. Still, she couldn't be the only appealing lass in San Francisco. Besides, most men waited to wed until they could properly look after a wife and family.

If he'd been a rich man's son instead of the offspring of a lowly sailor, however, perhaps he'd have shown a personal interest in Miss Clark or one of her socialite friends already.

Would he really have? he asked himself. He doubted it. There was a part of Michael that was repelled by the affectations of the wealthy, by the way they lorded it over the likes of him and his widowed mother. He knew Tess couldn't help that she'd been born into a life of luxury, yet he still found her background off-putting.

Which is just as well, he reminded himself. It was bad enough that they were likely to be seen out and about on this particular evening. If the maid Annie Dugan hadn't been along as a chaperone, he knew their time together could, if misinterpreted, lead to his ruination. His career with the fire department depended upon a sterling reputation as well as a

Spartan lifestyle and strong work ethic.

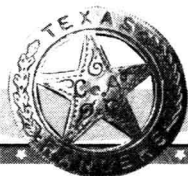
Michael had labored too long and hard to let anything spoil his pending promotion to captain. He set his jaw and grasped the reins of the carriage more tightly. Not even the prettiest, smartest, most persuasive girl in San Francisco was going to get away with doing that.

He sighed, realizing that Miss Tess Clark fit that description to a T.

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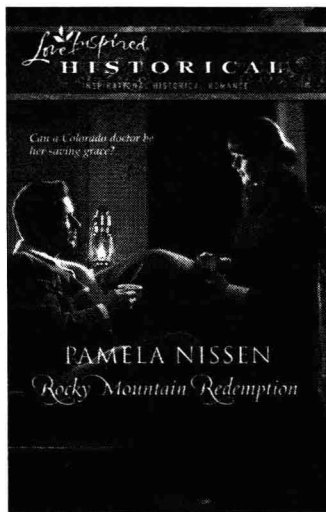


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“My dance, I believe?”

“Are you sure you’ve danced with every other female in town, from the oldest to the youngest?” Sarah asked archly.

He raised a brow, and in that moment she knew she’d made a mistake.

“Ah, so you were watching,” he said, grinning.

“I most certainly was not,” Sarah insisted. “I never sat down myself except when the musicians took a break. I only just realized that you hadn’t made good your threat to claim a dance.”

“Threat?” he echoed. “I believe I only requested a dance, as proof of your goodwill. And I was waiting for a waltz, Miss Matthews.”

“Oh? Why?” she asked. Was this girl asking the daring questions really her?

Again, the raised brow. “If you have to ask that, Miss Sarah Matthews, then it’s no wonder the South lost the war.”

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LAURIE KINGERY

makes her home in central Ohio, where she is a “Texan-in-exile.” Formerly writing as Laurie Grant for the Harlequin Historical line and other publishers, she is the author of eighteen previous books and the 1994 winner of a Readers’ Choice Award in the Short Historical category. She has also been nominated for Best First Medieval and Career Achievement in Western Historical Romance by *RT Book Reviews*. When not writing her historicals, she loves to travel, read, participate on Facebook and Shoutlife and write her blog on www.lauriekingery.com.

LAURIE KINGERY

The
DOCTOR TAKES
A WIFE



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THE DOCTOR TAKES A WIFE

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But God has not given us a spirit of fear,
but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

—II *Timothy* 1:7



To the wonderful people of San Saba County, Texas,
and in memory of the real settlement of Simpson
Creek, and as always, to Tom

Chapter One



“You look very lovely today, Miss Matthews,” said the voice in an accent that was as far from the usual drawl Sarah heard around her as Maine was from Texas. She stiffened, schooling herself to assume a polite expression as she looked up into the blue eyes of Dr. Nolan Walker.

A lady, she reminded herself sternly, did not make a scene in public, and most certainly not while standing in the receiving line at the wedding of her sister. Even if the speaker was a Yankee outsider who had no business being here.

“Thank you, sir,” she replied in a carefully neutral voice, and did not quite meet his gaze. “May I present Lord Edward Brookfield, Viscount Greyshaw, the groom’s eldest brother, come all the way from England?” She watched out of the corner of her eye as the Yankee doctor shook hands with the English nobleman next to her.

The men exchanged greetings.

“And may I also present—” she began, intent on passing the Yankee on down the line away from her.

Nolan interrupted her. "Miss Matthews, I was wondering if we might sit together while enjoying the refreshments?" He nodded toward the punch bowl and the magnificent quadruple-tiered wedding cake that Sarah considered the crowning achievement of her baking career. "I...I'd really like to get to know you better." He had dropped the "g" on "wondering," while "together" and "better" came out "togethah" and "bettah," and yet his accent was wholly unlike a Southern drawl.

The utter effrontery of the man! Hadn't she already made it clear back in October, when he'd come to town to meet her that she Was Not Interested in being courted by a Yankee and a liar? He'd written her a handful of letters telling all about himself, except for the one fact that made him Unacceptable—that he was Yankee. She'd only found out when he'd come to meet her on Founders' Day—right before the Comanche attack.

"I'm afraid that's impossible," she said crisply. "I'll be busy helping to serve the cake and the punch. Now—"

"Perhaps a dance, then? I understand there'll be dancing later."

She glared at him. "Out of the question," she snapped. "Now, *if I may be permitted to continue*, you're acquainted with Miss Caroline Wallace, aren't you, the bride's best friend?" She gestured to the bridesmaid standing next to her.

She didn't miss the surprised look Lord Greyshaw gave her, nor the sympathetic one he bestowed on the Yankee. Perhaps there would be a chance later, after the wedding, to explain to Nick's eldest brother

why a properly brought up young lady of the South did not encourage familiarity with pushy northern interlopers?

Mercifully, the doctor now allowed himself to be handed on down the line. The next person to approach was Mrs. Detwiler, an elderly widow, resplendent today in deep purple bombazine. Sarah hoped the woman had not heard what had passed between her and the Yankee doctor, for Mrs. Detwiler was sure to have an opinion on it, likely one contrary to Sarah's.

But luck was with Sarah—the older lady had indeed missed hearing the Yankee's words and Sarah's tart replies.

"You girls all looked lovely up at the altar," she proclaimed. "Was it dear Milly's idea to have her attendants decked out in different fall hues? She certainly picked colors that looked good on each of you."

Sarah smiled and glanced down at the gold *Gros de Naples* fabric she wore, knowing it complimented her blond coloring just as the mossy green cloth complimented Caroline Wallace's brunette hair and as the rust color played up Prissy Gilmore's strawberry-blond tresses. "Yes, and she sewed them all, too, as well as her bridal dress," Sarah said, gazing at Milly who was at this moment sharing a happy smile with Nicholas Brookfield, her English groom.

"My, her fingers must have been busy!"

Mrs. Detwiler didn't know the half of it, Sarah thought. Milly had not only had all that sewing to do, but had also determinedly learned how to cook under Sarah's tutelage. While she wasn't yet the confident cook and baker that her sister was, Sarah thought

it wasn't likely Nick and the rest of the men would starve with Milly minding the ranch kitchen once Sarah moved in to town. Now that Milly was a bride, Sarah had wanted her sister to be free to manage her house, and she had wanted to try her own wings, too. So when Prissy had begged Sarah to teach her cooking and the other housewifely arts, Sarah found a way to kill one bird with two stones and had agreed to move in with her.

"I declare, it's the wedding of the decade for Simpson Creek," Mrs. Detwiler gushed.

Sarah nodded. At the very least, it was the first wedding since the war ended, as well as the first which had resulted from Milly's founding of the Society for the Promotion of Marriage—or, as it was more commonly known, the Spinsters' Club. Milly deserved to be the very first bride, and the happiest, Sarah thought, growing misty-eyed with love and pride.

"Now it's *your* turn," the old woman announced, cupping Sarah's cheek affectionately.

Sarah cringed inwardly, hoping no one else had heard. "Oh, I don't think so, ma'am. Several others in the club have made matches and are engaged to marry, and I don't have a beau at the moment. But I'm in no hurry," she added in the most carefree tone she could manage. She wouldn't want Mrs. Detwiler to guess that her words had made Sarah remember Jesse, her fiancé who hadn't returned from the war.

"Pshaw," the older woman retorted. "A pretty girl like you? You should have beaux by the dozen. Why don't you see if you can catch the bouquet when your sister throws it, hmm?"