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*Seeking shelter from
more than the storm.*

LINDA FORD

Dakota Child

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Dear Reader,

When I started this story I was interested in exploring how loving a child gives people an incentive to make tremendous changes in their lives. I'm sure we've all experienced this to some degree, even if we aren't parents. Children, especially babies, are so helpless that it brings out protectiveness in us, and in many cases drives us to take steps that we wouldn't have had the strength to do before or perhaps haven't even seen the need of. As it turned out, the characters in my story had lots to overcome and loving a tiny baby did, indeed, prove to help them on their journey, as did their love for each other.

I hope, as you go along with Billy and Vivian on their journey, you will be encouraged in your own faith walk.

I love to hear from readers. Contact me through e-mail at linda@lindafor.org. Feel free to check on updates and bits about my research at my Web site, www.lindafor.org.

God bless,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Linda Ford". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name "Linda Ford".

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. When Billy was young, his family was attacked by Indians. How did this attack affect their lives? Is it still affecting them now?
2. When Vivian's parents died of a fever, leaving her an orphan, she was sent to an orphanage by the town elders. What could they have done instead?
3. Billy believes people see his size as a reason to mistrust him. What could he have done to prove them wrong?
4. What drove Vivian to get pregnant out of wedlock? What did she learn about herself through that? Is there some way she could have found what she needed some other way?
5. Vivian believes she can make everything all right by finding Joshua's father. Do you agree with her plan? Why or why not?
6. Billy remembers Vivian showing him kindness when they were younger. Why did that make such an impression on him and what does it reveal about Vivian?

7. While Vivian stays at Billy's house, she is somewhat afraid of Billy and his mother. Does she have good reason? Does she handle it well or could you suggest other ways for her to deal with having to stay with this pair?
8. At what point in the story did you know Vivian had faced her pain and was ready to start over as a responsible adult?
9. At what point did you know for certain that Billy had conquered his past?
10. Vivian knows she did wrong in engaging in sex outside marriage. Pastor Morrow reminds her that none of us is without sin. How is she prepared to deal with her sin?
11. Billy cannot, in good conscience, abandon his mother. Would you have done the same in his place? Why or why not?
12. All his life Billy has longed for the very things Vivian offers him—home, family and love. Yet he struggles to accept them. What is it that finally enables him to move past his fear of people's words?

13. Do you foresee a happy future for this couple?
What lessons do they learn that will strengthen
them in whatever challenges they face?

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"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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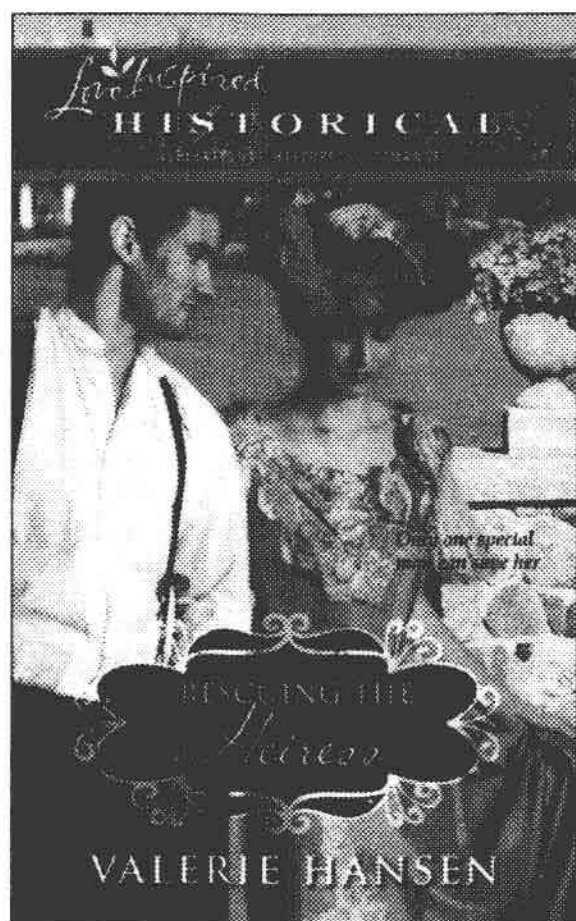
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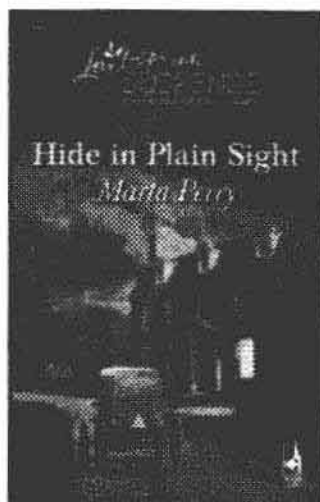
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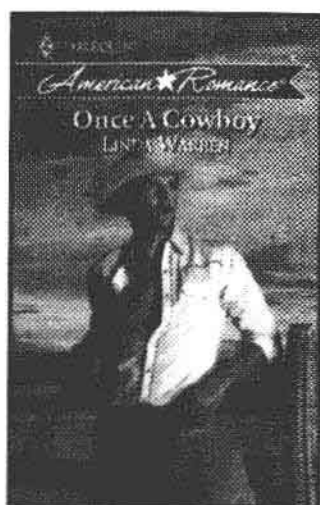
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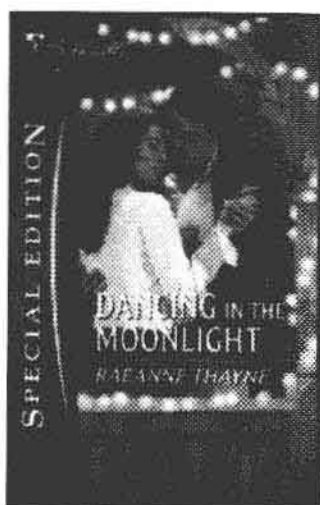
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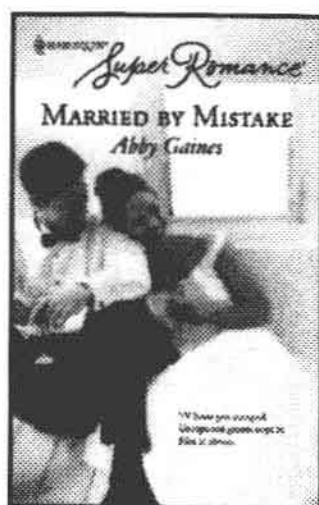
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