

THE SOUTHOLD CHRONICLES + BOOK 1

A PLACE
in
HIS HEART
A NOVEL



REBECCA DEMARINO


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In loving memory of
Helen Jean Horton Worley
1919 to 2005
my mother, and always my inspiration
and
dedicated to
Howard M. Worley
my dad, and always my champion

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1



October 21, 1630
London, England

Wooden ships languished in the Thames, lolling to and fro, like oxen taking a mud bath. The murky water lapped at the blackened oak as Papa's words washed over her once more. Mary Langton leaned over the crumbled stone wall and buried her face in her arms. How long she wept she could only guess.

Someone moved beside her, but she could not bear to look—could not bear to face anyone. She turned her tearstained face eastward to the great port.

After an eternity, she pressed a handkerchief to her reddened nose and cast a sideward glance. "Papa." She straightened and turned from him. What use would a discussion be?

Her sister approached and hope rose in her heart. An ally, perhaps? No, Lizzie stepped aside, apology evident in her eyes.

Papa's voice was strained, with a sadness she'd not heard since her mother had died. "You shall come to know that I am right, my girl. You might not agree with me today, but you shall see."

"You are wrong about that, just as you are wrong about forc-

ing me to marry Robert.” She whirled to face him and raised her chin. “How could you? Please don’t do this to me. Papa, the last thing I would want to do is to leave Mowsley and marry someone here in London. I could not bear to leave you and Lizzie. You know that.”

Before he could answer, wind and tide came together. Sails snapped. With creaks and groans the ships moved in awkward unison toward the North Sea. The same gust of wind that billowed sails lifted her hat.

She grabbed the brim with both hands, firmly settled it on her brow, and watched the ships as they bumped about, leaving port. Fresh tears pressed from the corners of her swollen eyes to the inky water below. “You might as well be sending me off to the colonies.” Her stomach clenched, causing the words to rush out in gasps, and she clutched her waist as she glanced at her father.

His cheeks reddened. “Hush. Do not say that. You know I love you dearly. I have always had your best interests at heart.” His voice was rough and strained.

He hurt as much as she did, she knew that, but still the words tumbled out. “Do you, Papa? And Nathan? Was he best for me?”

“Do not speak to me in that tone. I agree. Marriage to him would have been a tragedy, indeed, but ’tis why you must let me take care of you.”

It tore her heart to have words with Papa, but desperation urged her on. “I’m sorry, but how many tears must I shed? What must I do to make you see?” She was wailing now.

A second blast of wind caught her hat and sent it cartwheeling down the dock. She grasped her skirt as she raced after it. With her free hand she tried to hold her hair high on her head, but it tumbled down, swirling in the wind.

“Be careful. We shall buy you another,” Lizzie called as Mary’s boots flew over puddles in the chase.

The errant bonnet came to rest at the foot of the stone bridge spanning the Thames. With a sense of triumph, she scooped it from the mire, then stood to face her family. Her father, shoulders slumped, trudged up the cobbled path toward the shops as Lizzie came to her aid. Thank heavens. What took her so long?

“You should not run like that. You might have broken your ankle and then how would we get you home?” Lizzie’s eyes rolled as she shook her head, but a gentle smile played on her lips. “Father says we should go to the milliner’s. He has business to finish with Mistress Haskins.” She eyed the muddied gray felt with its high crown and wide brim. “It looks worse for wear anyway. Perhaps you shall get a new hat out of all of this.”

“Business to finish? I hope it has nothing to do with me and Robert. What shall I do? I do not love him. Not one whit. I shan’t marry him.”

Her sister’s eyes filled with sympathetic tears and the corners of her mouth quivered. “Father is adamant. After what happened with Nathan, he feels there is no other solution. Certainly your prospects for marriage in Mowsley are naught. Perhaps here in London . . . Perhaps Robert . . .”

Mugginess draped her like a shawl. Her nose wrinkled at the acrid stench of the water below. Nathan. What shame he had brought to her family. She pushed her sadness aside. “’Tis not as if I loved him, Lizzie.”

“Whatever do you mean? Nathan? I thought surely after five years you had grown to care for him. You cannot tell me you have no pain, that you did not love him.”

“I did not. Truly. I think I was more enamored with the idea of marriage than with Nathan.” She folded the cuff of her sleeves

back and fiddled with the lace. It looked much like the lace her sister had sewn into the gown for her wedding. She glanced at Lizzie sideways.

Did Lizzie believe her? She would never admit to another being, not even her sister, her love of Nathan. Not after he left her standing on the church steps. “I think by the time Nathan returned from university, he realized I lacked the skills he would need in a wife. Who needs a wife who rides horses and loves numbers? He feared I would rather be out riding than washing his clothes.”

“But you loved him, yes?”

She closed her eyes for a moment, bracing herself for the whitish lie. “Lizzie, I only care about the disgrace he brought you and Papa—how the whole village must have laughed at us. But I do not give a fig about Nathan or myself. I cried over the spoilt feast left on Papa’s table much more than Nathan Cadwell. How could he have done that?”

“Disgrace to be sure, but ’tis why you must let Father take care of you. Everyone in Mowsley knows of your disgrace. It was not very manly for Nathan to just abandon you rather than admit to you he had a change of heart. Father truly wants you to be happy. Let him take care of you, Mary.”

Lizzie wrapped her arm about her sister. “Tell him you shall marry Robert. Mistress Haskins will be a kind mother-in-law. She’s a good businesswoman, and we know she is a good cook—we’ve supped with them many times. Indeed, you can keep the books for her, as you do Father’s, and she’ll treasure your help as well as your company.”

They followed the narrow cobbled streets, and Mary covered her nose with her damp handkerchief. The perfume of the gardens mingled with the stench of garbage in the lane and under-

scored the capriciousness of the city. “I always look forward to our trips to London, but once I’m here I long for home.”

Her sister took her hand, her voice gentle. “You should know, little sister, Father wants to find a husband for you quickly. And London is the most likely place to find one. Mistress Haskins’s son is a most eligible one.”

“Do you not see, Lizzie? It cannot be Robert. I shall never love him.” She’d played with Robert when they were little, but as they grew older he treated her in a most awkward fashion, staring at her without saying a word. And with her engagement to Nathan, he had become downright hateful. “You and Zeke love each other and I want that someday too. Besides, he looks rather like a pudgy pear.”

An infectious giggle erupted and the two laughed until their sides ached. Lizzie smoothed her stomach and tried to regain a degree of decorum. “You shall be a spinster if you stay in Mowsley. Father shan’t be around forever. Besides, many women who marry for the social status fall in love later. It happens all the time.”

“And the men? Do they fall in love?”

“A man would be a fool not to fall in love with you, little sister, but you are not getting any younger.”

What could she say? Mary glanced up as the shops came into view and dabbed at the tears that still threatened.

Lizzie seized her arm, directing her into Haskins’ Hats. “A wool hat or silk?”

“I—I am not up to looking at hats, Lizzie.” She cast a look around, hoping to avoid Papa, Robert, and Mistress Haskins, as if that were possible.

“It will take your mind off your troubles. Come, this is always the favorite part of our trip. Please don’t spoil it now. Please?”

Her look was more than Mary could bear, and soon the two buried themselves in feathers and lace. Lizzie tried on a pretty purple silk and Mary noted how it gave her crystal-blue eyes a hint of violet. Her sister's striking black hair, arranged in ringlets and piled high on her head, added to the pleasing appearance. "I always feel so plain when I am with you."

Lizzie doffed the hat and placed it on Mary. "You are so silly. I've always wished for your hair, so long and thick." She reached out to smooth the stray tangles that framed her sister's face. "And your eyes are so pretty. Watercolor eyes. 'Tis what Father calls them."

"Watercolor eyes." Mary fluttered her lashes as she twisted her long hair and tucked it under. "He does, but whatever does that mean?"

Her sister laughed. "It means they change, like they were washed in color with a brush. They reflect your mood. Father says they are just like Mother's. I've always been a bit jealous, truth be told." She smiled. "Shall we try the blue? 'Tis your best color. That and green." She handed Mary the blue hat as she placed the purple back on her own head.

"Ahem."

Mary froze. There stood Papa and he did not look happy.

"You may each pick a hat, if you like. I need to show Mistress Haskins some samples of the felt I brought and speak to her about the wool order. After that we should be on our way. We need to make it to The Swan by nightfall. We shall sup there and stay the night."

Mary met Lizzie's smile with a wan attempt at joy. It looked like there was much more on Papa's mind than felt and wool. She turned to the window but caught her own reflection. Tears sprung, landing on her lashes like dewdrops on asters. What

agony. If only her life could remain the same, her world the same comfortable existence she knew growing up.

She wiped at her eyes, picked a hat, and smiled at Lizzie as Papa concluded his business with Mistress Haskins. At least Papa had not mentioned Robert. Hope glimmered.

Stardust, Starbelle, and Starnight stood patiently as the boxed purchases were secured above the pommel of their saddles. Papa lifted both girls to their horses before he mounted his own. Lizzie rode with a ladies' sidesaddle, but Mary much preferred riding astride like the men. It was how Papa taught her and she felt much more in control. They urged the Old English Blacks into a smooth trot. As the sun began its descent, London fell behind. They rode toward Mowsley and home.

Hours passed. The dark clouds scuttled away like the ships in the harbor, while autumn's low sun turned the rolling hills of wheat to a burnished gold. The wind rustled through yellow heart-shaped leaves of the silver birch that punctuated the landscape and brought refreshment to the weary trio. At last, The Swan came into view.

Papa reined Starnight to a walk, and Mary left Lizzie to move alongside him.

He leaned in his saddle and touched her arm. "This is a difficult time for you."

She smiled at him. "Yes, Papa, but I'm all right."

"I am not one to beat about the bush, as you know, my girl. We shall not find a marriage prospect for you in Mowsley. Mistress Haskins's son, Robert, is a fine lad—"

"Papa, no."

"Daughter, quiet." With a wrinkled brow, he studied the road. "As I said, he is a fine lad, and his mother adores you. You can help her with her books, as you do for me. You shall always

be well provided for. I shall come to London as often as I can and bring Elizabeth and the children. You may come home for visits. You know I love you dearly. I want the best for you, my girl. And may I remind you, there was a time when you were fond of Robert.”

“We were six.” She shifted in the saddle. “He rather turns my stomach now.”

Her hands trembled and Starbelle lost her footing for a moment. “Papa, I will try very, very hard to learn all of the accomplishments of a good wife. Lizzie will teach me. I want to be in love when I marry. I want what Lizzie has.”

“My dear girl, Elizabeth’s marriage to Ezekiel was arranged long before they married. And they fell in love, did they not?”

“Yes, Lizzie and I spoke about that today.”

“Believe me, it could be worse, and you will do as I say. This is my responsibility and for your own good. Your mother would have agreed.”

Her voice was soft as she turned back to her father. “Please, Papa, do not do this to me.”

There was no answer and she turned to flash a look toward Lizzie. Had her sister known all along that Papa had made his decision? How could she say nothing in her defense? She took a firm grip on the reins and urged her beloved Starbelle into a gallop toward The Swan.

Night fell quickly, but not soon enough. She wanted nothing more than to hide away in darkness where she could let her tears fall unnoticed. How could she marry a man without the love and passion she thought she’d found with Nathan? How hollow life would be. If only Mother were still alive. Would she say London was her only chance of marriage? Robert her only chance of a husband? Was there no chance of ever finding love?



Barnabas Horton's eyelids fluttered, but the crusted salt of tears held them shut. For a moment he forgot the pain and willed himself to remain in that blissful state between sleep and full consciousness. That place before reality sets in. But the first rays of morning sun made it impossible. He rubbed the grit from his eyes and rolled to an elbow. His fingers gently touched the empty space beside him in the bed. His throat tightened, but he rose and pulled on his long white shirt and breeches. He trudged to the kitchen.

A shiver ran through him. He stirred the embers in the massive fireplace and arranged logs and dried moss in the center. The large cauldron of water in the corner of the hearth would simmer soon. He pressed at his eyes. It should be Ann ladling hot water from the pot. Ann preparing their porridge. Ann. The oppressive air, still thick with the smell of smoke from yesterday's fire, hung like a shroud. *Lord, be my strength.*

A breeze, warmed by the morning sun, drifted through the open casement window. He turned. For a moment he expected to see his dear wife, she felt so near. Clearing his thoughts, he scooped hot water and oats into a small iron pot and hung it from the trammel. Flames sprung up and licked at its blackened bottom. He knew to concentrate on each task, one by one. Get through the morning, then the day. But what to do about the long nights remained troublesome.

A knock on the door interrupted his thoughts. "One moment, if you will." He stumbled over the butter churn as he moved to pull the heavy door open.

Plump Lydia Cunningham, basket in hand, stood on the flagstone walk. Susan Howell, small and birdlike, hid behind her. He looked from one to the other. Neither spoke.

He forced a smile, but his face felt like day-old bread. “Good morrow to you. I’ve yet to open. Pray, might you come back later?”

“Mr. Horton, our apologies for bothering you so early. We are traveling today and wanted to leave our dough with you.” Goody Cunningham held out her basket.

“How are your boys, Mr. Horton?” Goody Howell moved forward with her basket but stared at her feet.

“They do well.” His shoulders sagged as he took the dough. “The shop closes at five o’clock.”

“Aye, we shall be back early to pick up our bread. If it be helpful, we can stay and watch over your sons for you. Late afternoon is a busy time of day.”

“It is. Pray thee, know that I do appreciate your offer. The ladies of the village have been most kind. But no. Thank you, but no.” He shoved the door shut. The women’s voices drifted through the window and he paused.

“He does not look well.”

“Nay, he is not himself. I miss his cheerful smile. ’Tis only been three months, Susan. Not a wonder he still grieves, poor man.”

“I visited Ann’s grave yesterday. The blue slate is beautiful.”

“The blue slate?”

“Aye, her gravestone. He carved it himself.”

He set the baskets down and studied the fire. Ladies from all over the village would be at his door soon. He picked up the fire iron and poked at the logs. Ann appeared in his thoughts. Why could he not keep his mind on work? He forced himself to shift to the matters of the day as he ladled steaming porridge into the bowls. “Boys, come and sit.”

They took their usual seats at the worn oak table. Benjamin sat too close to his brother, who immediately rolled his eyes

and tried to push him away. Barnabas sent him a stern look, and Joseph, age five, and two years older than little Benjamin, obediently bowed his head and listened as his father led them in prayer and Scripture.

The three ate in silence.

Barnabas gave each boy a bit of bread to wipe their bowls and spoons clean. They popped the bread into their mouths, put their dishes on the shelf, and wiped the crumbs away with a kitchen rag.

“Before the ladies bring in their bread, we need to go to the shop for a loaf of sugar.” He banked the fire and swept soot from the hearth. Pulling on his vest, he nodded to his youngest. “Come here, Benjamin, let me help you with your boots.” He scooted the boys out the door, then stepped back inside to fetch a black handkerchief and tied it above his elbow.

They marched down the village green, a small hand clasped in each of his. Warm days and crisp, cold nights had dressed the line of old oaks in a splendor of yellow, orange, and red, but their glory was a blur as trickles of sweat wound their way down across his cheeks. Certainly, it was only sweat.

At the shop, he allowed the boys to amuse themselves with various balls of string from the display and went in search of his supplies. He wiped his brow with his sleeve and looked about for the proprietor, Mr. Webb. A young woman stood by the counter. Ah, yes. The new shopgirl.

“Good day, miss. If you please, I am not finding the sugar . . .”

She turned. Her wide hazel eyes reflected the green of her dress as she regarded him.

Fudge. He knew her but could not quite place her. The silk dress with the elegant lace was definitely not one of a shopgirl. She certainly looked pretty.

“Mr. Horton. ’Tis me . . . Mary Langton.” A sweet smile spread across her lips. She quickly cast her look downward, a faint tinge of pink appearing on her cheeks.

“Miss Mary Langton? It cannot be. Why, Miss Langton, you were just a wee bit of a girl. Now, look at you—a—a young woman.” His mouth felt full of gauze and he diverted his gaze.

“I know ’tis been a long time since you have seen me, perhaps not since my mother died? I remember coming to the bakeshop with her, and you would give me a ginger cake. She always enjoyed your stories. You know my sister, Lizzie—I mean Elizabeth—of course.”

“Aye. Your mother was one of my favorite customers and certainly your sister still is.”

“She makes all of the bread dough for Papa and me. Cook would rather make it, but Papa insists that Lizzie do it.”

“Aye, I see. Our boys are the same age.”

“Really? She never told me that. She has two girls as well. Rachel and Ruth.”

He studied her closely. “I know.” He tried a smile, but his face cracked. “How fortunate to see you today. It has obviously been too long.”

A second blush of color sprang across her cheeks. “Forgive me, Mr. Horton, but I fear I prattle on. Pray give your wife my regards.”

Long moments passed as he attempted to keep his grief in the private places of his heart. His throat tightened and he struggled to clear it. “My wife—”

“Give that back, Joseph!” Benjamin’s forlorn wails filled all corners of the shop.

Barnabas winced and drew a deep breath. “I do believe that is my son. I hope we shall meet again. Now, I must go and see

what the crying is about. Since their mother died, they seem to argue and fight constantly. Good day, Miss Langton.” He bowed, turned, and hurried to the boys just in time to see Joseph seize Benjamin.

“Mother was right, Benjamin. You will always be the baby. A big baby.”

“Stop this now, Joseph. What on this earth is happening here?” Barnabas viewed the string littered across the floor in a tangle of disarray.

“He was making a mess. I was just straightening it out. I told him he shouldn’t be doing that, but he doesn’t listen to me.”

Tears streamed down Benjamin’s cheeks. His blond curls and blue eyes reminded Barnabas constantly of Ann. His heart melted as he stooped down. “Benjamin, let us see who can make the biggest ball. And, Joseph, you must come and tell me when you cannot control him. Do not fight with your brother. There are things that God expects us to fight for, true. But string is not one of them. Do you understand?”

Joseph stared sullenly at the string.

“Yes, or no, Joseph?”

“Yes, Father, but he was—”

“Do not argue. Listen to me.” The agitation and tone of his voice gave him pause.

Miss Langton appeared with a sugar loaf. “Mr. Webb said he would add it to your account.” Her smile was warm and sympathetic.

“Gracious. Thank you. No doubt I would have forgotten it.” His eyes crinkled with a small smile of gratitude as she knelt near Joseph.

“I fear your father is in need of help here,” she said. “Shall we pick up string too?”

She handed a strand to Joseph. The four worked at sorting and winding string, and with the last ball returned to the shelf, Barnabas took Joseph's hand. "Thank you, Miss Langton. It truly was a pleasure to meet you once again." He glanced at the scuff on his boots. "I do apologize for thinking you to be tending the shop." He studied her once more. Was she offended by his presumption or was that pity he saw in those lovely eyes?

Miss Langton curtsied and looked him full in the face, her brow wrinkled, but a gentle look in her eyes. "I am so saddened to hear of your wife's death. You have fine boys, Mr. Horton. I must ask Lizzie if she might have them over to play with Joshua and the girls."

The sincerity in her voice struck him. His own words were not forthcoming—a rare predicament.

Joseph tugged at his hand.

"Thank you, again. You are most kind. I must take the boys home, it will be a busy day at the bakeshop." He bowed. "Good morrow, Miss Langton." Reaching for Benjamin's hand, he tightened his grip and led them out.

As they walked up the flagstone to their home and bakeshop, Barnabas paused. A wooden shutter hung askew. How long had it been like that?

Once inside, he pulled the door shut and sank into his chair. If only he could hide away from the world and allow his grief to consume him. Instead, he brought his sons into his arms and clung to them.

"Joseph." His words were jagged in his throat. "You are so much like me that I fear at times I am too strict with you. I look at your face, and it is like peering into a mirror. I expect much of myself and therefore I expect much of you. I know that is difficult for you to understand." He rested his chin on Joseph's head.

His gaze roamed the room as he took in every detail. The musket leaned against the wall. Ann liked to call it his quart pot, ever since he blew the end off of it. The tallow candle on the wooden beam high above the fireplace was squat and needed to be replaced soon. She never would have let the candle burn so low. Beside it lay the kitchen tongs. The memory of their wedding day, when she'd been presented with the tongs by his mother, caused his throat to constrict. Her pleasure at becoming keeper of the tongs—mistress of their hearth and home—he held close in his heart.

He pulled back and looked into Joseph's large, sad eyes. "Your mother thought I was too harsh with you. If that be true, I am sorry. I love you and Benjamin. You are all I have left of her. I will try to be a better father. I promised your mother I would always keep you safe and I will."

He sat for a while, his sons resting in his arms. Ann did so many things to make their home comfortable and happy. She could reprimand with a gentle smile. A woman's touch, no doubt. He could never replace her, but did he not owe it to their boys to find a woman to raise them? Ann would want that.

The meeting with Miss Langton came to mind. Her father owned land a few miles north of Mowsley, on the road to Saddington, and did business in wool and felt. Her sister, Elizabeth, he knew to be an accomplished woman, skilled in all of the domestic arts. Mayhap Miss Langton shared some of her sister's domestic acumen. She was certainly lovely to look at.



Mary dawdled as she walked home. Why did her sister not tell her of the death of the baker's wife? Surely everyone in the hamlet knew. Her cheeks grew hot. The black scarf tied around

his arm—she hadn't noticed it at first, but she should have. That Lizzie. Ever since their mother died, she always tried to protect her. Always thinking she knew better.

Her mind wandered to young Joseph. You certainly could tell they were father and son. Their hair—a mane, really—glossy and dark brown. And those green, penetrating eyes. She found herself smiling, a first since she'd returned from London. He certainly had his hands full with those two boys. Joseph wanted to be the big brother and take care of Benjamin. He tried to look tough when Mr. Horton reprimanded him.

She breathed in the fresh fall air as she passed a large manor on her right and fields of sheep on her left. Her sister liked living on the village green, but Mary enjoyed the short jaunt to and from the hamlet. As she turned up the lane to her house, she quickened her pace. She pushed open the heavy door and walked through the hall to the parlor. Her father sat next to the gateleg table, reviewing the figures she had given him earlier that morning. She listlessly sat and ran her hand over the green damask of the chair.

“Mary, I see you have returned.”

“Papa, yes—yes, I'm back.”

“And?” He lifted his eyes toward her expectantly.

“And what, Papa?”

“Did you not go to the shop? I thought you needed your . . . what was it? Soap?”

“Yes, Papa, I did go. I seem to be a bit light-minded today. I forgot my soap. Papa, do you know Mr. Horton, the baker?”

“Of course. His father owns the mill.”

“What did Mother think of him?”

“She said he made her laugh. She liked him very much, but it is my impression all of the ladies do.” His blue eyes twinkled as he ran fingers through his silvery hair.

“Papa, I have given a lot of thought to what I told you and Lizzie in London.”

“What is that, my girl?”

“I need to apply myself to learning the skills every good wife should have.”

“Such as?”

“Why, any of the domestic arts.”

Her father returned to the list of numbers, then rubbed his eyes. “You will do well to learn from your sister, to be sure. Your mother taught her well. But know that Robert will take you as you are. He worships you, my girl.”

Her heart wrenched. Why could he not see that Robert didn’t worship her? That he was more a rascal than an admirer. “I think I shall wander now in the garden, Papa.” She slipped out the door.

She followed the winding path where spent vines of clingy honeysuckle and sweet jasmine formed an arch. The gardener had been at work preparing to do an autumn planting of sweet peas. She knelt to the plucky herbs and haphazardly picked some thyme and the lemon balm that took over every bare inch. She needed to speak to her sister. And soon.