



Surrender of a Siren (Wanton Dairymaid Trilogy)

By Tessa Dare

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New author Tessa Dare takes passion to the high seas in this steamy tale of a runaway bride and a devilishly disarming privateer.

Desperate to escape a loveless marriage and society's constraints, pampered heiress Sophia Hathaway jilts her groom, packs up her paints and sketchbook, and assumes a new identity, posing as a governess to secure passage on the Aphrodite. She wants a life of her own: unsheltered, unconventional, uninhibited. But it's one thing to sketch her most wanton fantasies, and quite another to face the dangerously handsome libertine who would steal both her virtue and her gold.

To any well-bred lady, Benedict "Gray" Grayson is trouble in snug-fitting boots. A conscienceless scoundrel who sails the seas for pleasure and profit, Gray lives for conquest—until Sophia's perception and artistry stir his heart. Suddenly he'll brave sharks, fire, storm, and sea just to keep her at his side. She's beautiful, refined, and ripe for seduction. Could this counterfeit governess be a rogue's redemption? Or will the runaway heiress's secrets destroy their only chance at love?

From the Paperback edition.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Dare's second novel cements her place as a "not to be missed" author. Her gift is for creating stories that are filled with adventure, three-dimensional characters and exciting plots, yet she maintains the purest form of romance"

About the Author

Tessa Dare a part-time librarian, full-time mommy, and swing-shift writer. She makes her home in Southern California, where she shares a cozy, cluttered bungalow with her husband, their two children, and a dog.

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Chapter One

Gravesend, December 1817

In fleeing the society wedding of the year, Sophia Hathaway knew she would be embracing infamy.

She'd neglected to consider how infamy *smelled*. She paused in the doorway of the fetid dockside tavern. Even from here, the stench of soured ale accosted her, forcing bile into her throat.

A burly man elbowed her aside as he went out the door. "Watch yerself, luv."

She pasted herself against the doorjamb, wondering at the singular form of address implied in "luv." The man's comment had clearly been directed toward *both* of her breasts.

With a shiver, she wrapped her cloak tight across her chest.

Taking one last deep breath, she sidled her way into the dank, drunken confusion, forbidding her gray serge skirts to brush against anything. Much less *anyone*. From every murky corner— and for a squared-off tea caddy of a building, this tavern abounded in murky corners— eyes followed her. Suspicious, leering eyes, set in hard, unshaven faces. It was enough to make any young woman anxious. For a fugitive young lady of quality, traveling alone, under the flimsy shield of a borrowed cloak and a fabricated identity . . .

Well, it was almost enough to make Sophia reconsider the whole affair.

An unseen someone jostled her from behind. Her gloved fingers instinctively clutched the envelope secreted in her cloak. She thought of its brethren, the letters she'd posted just that morning, breaking her engagement and ensuring a scandal of Byronic proportions. Seeds of irrevocable ruin, scattered with the wind.

A cold sense of destiny anchored her rising stomach. There was no going back now. She could walk through far worse than this shabby pub, if it meant leaving her restrictive life behind. She could even endure these coarse men ogling her breasts, so long as they did not glimpse the secret strapped between them.

Her resolve firmed, Sophia caught the eye of a baldheaded man wiping a table with a greasy rag. He looked harmless enough— or at least, too old to strike quickly. She smiled at him. He returned the gesture with a completely toothless grin.

Her own smile faltering, she ventured, “I’m looking for Captain Grayson.”

“ ‘Course you is. All the comely ones are.” The gleaming pate jerked. “Gray’s in the back.”

She followed the direction indicated, moving through the crowd on tiptoe in an effort to keep her hem off the floor. The sticky floorboards sucked at her half boots. Toward the back of the room, she spied a boisterous knot of men and women near the bar. One man stood taller than the others, his auburn hair looking cleaner than that of his company. A brushed felt beaver rested on the bar nearby, an oddly refined ornament for this seedy den. As Sophia angled for a better view, a chair slid out from a nearby table, clipping her in the knee. She bobbed on tiptoe for a moment before tripping forward.

The hem of her cloak caught on her boot, and the cloak wrenched open, exposing her chest and throat to the sour, wintry air. In her desperate attempt to right herself, she clutched wildly for the wall—

And grasped a handful of rough linen shirt instead. The shirt’s own er turned to her. “Hullo there, chicken,” he slurred, his breath rancid with decay. His liquorglazed eyes slid over her body and settled on the swell of her breasts. “Fancy bit of goods you are. By looks, I would have priced you beyond my pocket, but if you’s offerin’ . . .”

Had he mistaken her for some dockside trollop?

Sophia’s tongue curled with disgust. Perhaps she was disguised in simple garments, but certainly she did not look *cheap*.

“I am not offering,” she said firmly. She tried to wriggle away, but with a quick move, he had her pinned against the bar.

“Hold there, lovely. Jes’ a little tickle, then.”

His grimy fingers dove into the valley of her bosom, and Sophia yelped. “Unhand me, you . . . you revolting brute!”

The brute released one of her arms to further his lascivious exploration, and Sophia used her newly freed hand to beat him about the head. No use. His fingers squirmed between her breasts like fat, greedy worms burrowing in the dark.

“Stop this,” she cried, making her hand a fist and clouting his ear, to no avail. Her efforts at defense only amused her drunken attacker.

“S’ all right,” he said, chuckling. “I likes my girls with plenty o’ pluck.”

Desperation clawed at her insides. It wasn’t simply the insult of this lout’s hands on her breasts that had her panicking. She’d forfeited her genteel reputation the moment she left home. But his fingers groped closer and closer to the one thing she dared not surrender. If he found it, Sophia doubted she would escape this tavern with her life intact, much less her virtue.

Her attacker turned his head, angling for a better look down her dress. His grimy ear was just inches from her mouth. Within snapping distance. If she bit it hard enough, she might startle him into letting her go. She had all but made up her mind to do it, when she inhaled another mouthful of his rank sweat and paused. If her choices were putting her mouth on this repulsive beast or dying, she just might rather die.

In the end, she didn't do either.

The repulsive beast gave a yawp of surprise as a pair of massive hands bodily hauled him away. Lifted him, actually, as though the brute weighed nothing, until he writhed in the air above her like a fish on a hook.

"Come now, Bains," said a smooth, confident baritone, "you know better than that."

With an easy motion, her rescuer tossed Bains aside. The brute landed some feet away, with the crunch of splintering wood.

Sagging against the bar with relief, Sophia peered up at her savior. It was the tall, auburn-haired gentleman she'd spied earlier. At least, she assumed him to be a gentleman. His accent bespoke education, and with his dark-green topcoat, fawn-colored trousers, and tasseled Hessians, he cut a fashionable silhouette. But as his arms flexed, the finely tailored clothing delineated raw, muscled power beneath.

And there was nothing refined about his face. His features were rough-hewn, his skin bronzed by the sun. It was impossible not to stare at the golden, weathered hue and wonder—did it fade at his cravat? At his waist? Not at all?

The more she peered up at the man, the less she knew what to make of him. He had a gentleman's attire, a laborer's body . . . and the wide, sensuous mouth of a scoundrel.

"How many times do I have to tell you, Bains? That's no way to touch a woman." His words were addressed to the lout on the floor, but his roguish gaze was fixed on her. Then he smiled, and the lazy quirk of his lips tugged a thin scar slanting from his jaw to his mouth.

Oh yes, that mouth was dangerous indeed.

At that moment, Sophia could have kissed it.

"The proper way to touch a woman," he continued, sauntering to her side and propping an elbow on the bar, "is to come at her from the side, like so." In an attitude of perfect nonchalance, he leaned his weight on his arm and slid it along the bar until his knuckles came within a hair's width of her breast.

Mouth of a scoundrel, indeed! Sophia's gratitude quickly turned to indignation. Had this man truly yanked one lout off her just so he could grope her himself? Apparently so. His hand rested so close to her breast, her flesh heated in the shadow of his fingers. So close, her skin prickled, anticipating the rough texture of his touch. She wished he *would* touch her, end the excruciating uncertainty, and give her an excuse to slap the roguish smirk from his face.

"See?" he said, wagging his fingers in the vicinity of her bosom. "This way you don't startle her off."

Coarse laughter rumbled through the assembled crowd. Retracting his hand, the scoundrel lifted his voice.

“Don’t I have the right of it, Megs?”

All eyes turned to a curvy redhead gathering tankards. Megs barely looked up from her work as she sang out, “Ain’t no one like Gray knows how to touch a lady.” Laughter swept the tavern again, louder this time. Even Bains chuckled.

Gray. Sophia’s heart plummeted. What was it the bald man had said, when she asked for Captain Grayson? *Gray’s in the back.*

“One last thing to remember, Bains,” Gray continued.

“The least you can do is buy the lady a drink.” As the tavern-goers returned to their carousing, he turned his arrogant grin on Sophia. “What are you having, then?” She blinked at him.

What was she having? Sophia knew exactly what she was having. She was having colossally bad luck.

This well-dressed mountain of insolence looming over her was Captain Grayson, of the brig *Aphrodite*. And the brig *Aphrodite* was the sole ship bound for Tortola until next week. For Sophia, next week might as well have been next year. She needed to leave for Tortola. She needed to leave now. Therefore, she needed this man—or rather, this man’s *ship*—to take her.

“What, no outpouring of gratitude?” He cast a glance toward Bains, who was lumbering up from the floor. “I suppose you think I should have beat him to a pulp. I could have. But then, I don’t like violence. It always ends up costing me money. And pretty thing that you are”—his eyes skipped over her as he motioned to the barkeep—“before I went to that much effort, I think I’d at least need to know your name, Miss . . . ?”

Sophia gritted her teeth, marshalling all her available forbearance. She needed to leave, she reminded herself. She needed this man. “Turner. Miss Jane Turner.”

“Miss . . . Jane . . . Turner.” He teased the syllables out, as if tasting them on his tongue. Sophia had always thought her middle name to be the dullest, plainest syllable imaginable. But from his lips, even “Jane” sounded indecent.

“Well, Miss *Jane* Turner. What are you drinking?”

“I’m not drinking anything. I’m looking for you, *Captain* Grayson. I’ve come seeking passage on your ship.”

“On the *Aphrodite*? To Tortola? Why the devil would you want to go there?”

“I’m a governess. I’m to be employed, near Road Town.” The lies rolled effortlessly off her tongue. As always. His eyes swept her from bonnet to half boots, stroking an unwelcome shiver down to her toes. “You don’t look like any governess I’ve ever seen.” His gaze settled on her hands, and Sophia quickly balled them into fists.

The gloves. Curse her vanity. Her maid’s old dress and cloak served well for disguise—their dark, shapeless folds could hide a multitude of sins. But as she’d dressed herself for the first time in her life that morning, her fingers shook with nerves and cold, and Sophia had assuaged their trembling with this one indulgence, her best pair of black kid gloves, fastened with tiny black pearl buttons and lined with sable.

They were not the gloves of a governess.

For a moment, Sophia feared he would see the truth. Balderdash, she chided herself. No one ever looked at her and saw the truth. People saw what they wanted to see . . . the obedient daughter, the innocent maiden, the society belle, the blushing bride. This merchant captain was no different. He would see a passenger, and the promise of coin.

Long ago, she'd learned this key to deceit. It was easy to lie, once you understood that no one really wanted the truth.

"Lovely, aren't they? They were a gift." With a gloved flourish, she held out her letter. The envelope bore the wear and marks of a transatlantic voyage. "My offer of employment, if you'd care to examine it." She sent up a quick prayer that he would not. "From a Mr. Waltham of Eleanora plantation."

"Waltham?" He laughed, waving away the letter. Sophia pocketed it quickly.

"Miss Turner, you've no idea what trials you're facing. Never mind the dangers of an ocean crossing, the tropical poverty and disease . . . George Waltham's brats are a plague upon the earth. One your delicate nature and fine gloves are unlikely to survive."

"You know the family, then?" Sophia kept her tone light, but inwardly she loosed a flurry of curses. She'd never considered the possibility that this merchant captain could claim an acquaintance with the Walthams.

"Oh, I know Waltham," he continued. "We grew up together. Our fathers' plantations shared a boundary.

He was older by several years, but I paced him for mischief well enough."

Sophia swallowed a groan. Captain Grayson not only *knew* Mr. Waltham— they were friends and neighbors! All her plans, all her carefully tiered lies . . . this bit of information shuffled them like a deck of cards.

He continued, "And you're traveling alone, with no chaperone?"

"I can look after myself."

"Ah, yes. And I tossed Bains across the room just now for my own amusement. It's a little game we seamen like to play."

"I can look after myself," she insisted. "If you'd waited another moment, that revolting beast would be missing an ear."

He gave her a deep, scrutinizing look that made her feel like a turned- out glove, all seams and raw edges. She breathed steadily, fighting the blush creeping up her cheeks.

"Miss Turner," he said dryly, "I'm certain in that fertile female imagination of yours, you think sailing off to the West Indies will be some grand, romantic adventure." He drawled the phrase in a patronizing tone, but Sophia wasn't certain he meant to deride *her*. Rather, she surmised, his tone communicated a general weariness with adventure.

How sad.

“Fortunately,” he continued, “I’ve never known a girl I couldn’t disillusion, so listen close to me now. You’re wrong. You will not find adventure, nor romance. At best, you’ll meet with unspeakable boredom. At worst, you’ll meet with an early death.”

Sophia blinked. His description of Tortola gave her some pause, but she dismissed any concern quickly. After all, it wasn’t as though she meant to *stay* there. The captain reached to retrieve his felt beaver from the bar.

“Please.” She clutched his arm. Heavens. It was like clutching a wool-sheathed cannon. Ignoring the warm tingle in her belly, she made her eyes wide and her voice beseeching. The role of innocent, helpless miss was one she’d been playing for years. “Please, you must take me. I’ve nowhere else to go.”

“Oh, I’m certain you’d figure something out. Pretty thing like you? After all,” he said, quirking an eyebrow, “you can look after yourself.”

“Captain Grayson—”

“Miss. Jane. Turner.” His voice grew thin with impatience.

“You waste your breath, appealing to my sense of honor and decency. Any gentleman in my place would send you off at once.”

“Yes, but you’re no gentleman.” She gripped his arm again and looked him square in the eye. “Are you?” He froze. All that muscle rippling with energy, the rugged profile animated by insolence—for an instant, it all turned to stone. Sophia held her breath, knowing she’d just wagered her future on this, the last remaining card in her hand.

But this was so much more thrilling than whist.

“No,” he said finally. “No, I’m not. I’m a tradesman, and I need to turn a profit. So long as you’ve silver to pay your passage, the brig *Aphrodite* has a waiting berth.” Relief sighed through her body. “Thank you.”

“Have you trunks?”

“Two. Outside with a porter.”

“Very well.” His mouth curved in a slow, devilish smile. A conspiratorial smile. The sort of smile a young lady of fine breeding didn’t acknowledge, let alone return. So naturally, wicked thing that she was, Sophia smiled back.

“Well,” he murmured, “this is going to be a challenge.”

“What is?” she asked, feeling suddenly disinclined to put up much of a fight.

“Retrieving your trunks, with you clinging to my arm.”

“Oh.” Yes, she was still clinging to his arm, wasn’t she? Drat. And yet—she wasn’t quite ready to let it

go. Maybe it was the lingering desperation from her episode with Bains, or the flood of profound relief that accompanied her rescue. Perhaps it was a perverse fascination with this enigma of a man, who possessed the brute strength to toss grown men around, and just enough charm to be truly dangerous. Or maybe it was simply the feel of his rock-hard muscles beneath her hand, and the knowledge that she'd made them flex. Sophia couldn't say. But touching him made her feel exhilarated. Powerful and alive. Everything she'd been waiting her whole life to feel. Everything she'd been prepared to travel halfway across the globe to find.

In running away, she had made the decision to embrace infamy.

And lo, here he was.

The girl really needed to let him go.

This was the voyage Gray went respectable. And it was off to a very bad start.

It was all her fault—this delicate wisp of a governess, with that porcelain complexion and her big, round eyes tilting up at him like Wedgwood teacups. She looked as if she might break if he breathed on her wrong, and those eyes kept beseeching him, imploring him, making demands. *Please, rescue me from this pawing brute. Please, take me on your ship and away to Tortola. Please, strip me out of this revolting gown and initiate me in the pleasures of the flesh right here on the barstool.*

Well, innocent miss that she was, she might have lacked words to voice the third quite that way. But, worldly man that he was, Gray could interpret the silent petition quite clearly. He only wished he could discourage his body's instinctive, affirmative response.

He didn't know what to do with the girl. He ought to do the respectable thing, seeing as how this voyage marked the beginning of his respectable career. But Miss Turner had him pegged. He was no kind of gentleman, and damned if he knew the respectable thing. Allowing a young, unmarried, winsome lady to travel unaccompanied probably wasn't it. But then, if he refused her, who was to say she wouldn't end up in an even worse situation? The chit couldn't handle herself for five minutes in a tavern. Was he truly going to turn her loose on the Gravesend quay? What would he tell George Waltham then?

Damn it. After years of aimless carousing, Gray had reached the point in his life where, for one reason and another, he actually wanted to behave in an honorable fashion. The trouble was, somewhere in all those years of aimless carousing, he'd mislaid his sense of honor. He could sail through a cyclone and not lose his course. He could navigate a woman's body in the dark. But his moral compass had grown rusted with disuse.

However . . . he never lost sight of the bottom line. And so, with this governess putting him to the test, Gray reverted to his usual method of making decisions—he opted for profit. Miss Jane Turner was a passenger. He had a ship with empty berths. The decision was simple. He was a tradesman, and this was business. Strictly business. He had no business studying the exquisite alabaster sweep of her cheekbone.

And she had no business clutching his arm.

“Miss Turner,” he said sternly, in the same voice he gave orders to his crew.

“Yes?”

“Let me go now.”

She released his arm, blushing fetchingly as she did so and looking up at him through trembling lashes. Gray sighed. If it wasn't one thing, it was another.

“I've one last piece of business, then. Stay here.” With that imperious command, he crossed the tavern. Bains sat at a table, hunkered over a fresh tankard of ale. Gray clapped a hand on his shoulder and leaned over to speak in his unwashed ear. A few more stern words, a few coins, and there was one more quandary resolved to his profit.

“Now then, Miss Turner. We can be on our way.” Grasping her firmly by the elbow, he whisked her out the tavern door.

“You gave him money?” Struggling under his grip, she twisted to look back toward Bains. “After what he did to me, what you did to him . . . You *paid* him?”

Ignoring her question, he caught the porter's eye.

“The lady's belongings,” he commanded briskly.

The porter wrapped beefy forearms around the larger of her two trunks. Gray reached for the smaller one, hefting it onto his shoulder and holding it balanced there with one hand. He took three paces before he realized she wasn't following.

He paused long enough to toss a comment over his shoulder. “Come along, then. I'll take you out to the *Aphrodite*. You'll be wanting to meet the captain.”

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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