

*A
Token
of
Love*

CARRIE TURANSKY

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To my silver friends,
Lisa and Renee,
and my gold friends,
Cathy, Terri, Cher, and Ann.

*“Make new friends, but keep the old.
One is silver and the other gold.”
—Joseph Parry*

“Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.”

Isaiah 58:6–8 ESV



1

1885

LONDON

Lillian Grace Freemont took up her pen and let her thoughts flow onto the paper. *We must give women more opportunities through education and employment to lift themselves from poverty and shame to positions of respectability and honor. Not only for their own sakes, but for their children, and for the betterment of all society.*

She reread her words, and her throat tightened. Some poor women and girls were cast off and condemned to a life of heartache and pain, with no way out. Why didn't more people speak up for them? Were they too uncomfortable with the subject or simply afraid of what others would think of them if they aligned themselves with their cause? Someone had to take a stand and speak for those who could not speak for themselves.

She rose from her desk and paced across the dark-paneled library of her Eaton Square townhouse. The invitation she'd received to address the Montrose Women's League was an exceptional opportunity. It was the chance to stir the hearts of influential women and motivate them to work for much-needed change.

But could she write a speech worthy of the occasion?

She believed in the cause with all her heart, but she'd never

spoken to a large group. For the past few years, she'd focused her attention on serving in her church. But her growing awareness of the needs around her had strengthened her desire to do more.

She'd only voiced her opinion to individuals or in a small circle of friends. But one of those friends had been impressed by what she'd said and passed her name on to the committee leading the League. That had prompted the invitation to present her thoughts at the May meeting. Knowing she would be speaking to a large group on such a challenging topic had made her toss and turn in bed until well after midnight for the last few days. Her fear of public speaking was enough to make her knees quake and her voice falter.

She pulled in a deep breath and closed her eyes. *Please, Lord, help me pull this together. Help me find the right words to make the cause clear and compelling. Give me courage to do what I must!*

Footsteps sounded in the hall, and she opened her eyes.

Her housekeeper, Mrs. Pringle, stepped into view in the open doorway. "A message arrived for you, ma'am."

Lillian eyed the envelope in the housekeeper's hand. "Please, come in. Why didn't Stanford answer the door?"

Mrs. Pringle crossed the room and handed her the envelope. "The young lad who brought the message came to the kitchen door."

"That's odd."

"Yes, but from the look of him, I'd say he's from the East End or some other poor area of town. I suppose he knew he might be turned away if he came to the front door."

Lillian glanced at the envelope. "Is he waiting for a reply?"

"No. He ran off as soon as he handed it to me. He didn't even wait for a sixpence."

"Thank you, Mrs. Pringle."

The housekeeper nodded and left the room.

Lillian tore open the envelope and took out the folded piece of paper. Her eyes darted from her name at the top to the signature at the bottom. *Forever your loving sister, Serena.*

She gasped and sank into the nearest chair. It had been almost nine years since she'd heard from her sister. Serena had run away with a soldier named Robert Dunsmore when she was only seventeen, bringing deep heartache to Lillian and their widowed mother. They had no idea where she'd gone and had only received one brief note five months after she left, announcing the birth of her daughter, Alice.

Painful memories washed over Lillian, bringing a wave of regret. She should have done more to find her sister and bring her home. Gripping the letter, she scanned the words written in a shaky hand.

Dear Lillian,

I know it has been many years since I've written. I am sorry for that, and I ask your forgiveness. I hope you'll come to me now, despite my past mistakes, for I fear I am not long for this world.

Lillian lifted her hand to her heart. How could her little sister be dying? Serena was only twenty-six years old.

There is much I want to explain. But more important than explanations, I need your help to reclaim my daughter, Alice. I had no choice but to turn her over to the Foundling Hospital when she was only three months old. She is now almost eight, and you must reclaim her soon, or I'm afraid she will be sent out to apprentice as a domestic and we'll not be able to find her.

I know I should've reached out to you and Mother sooner, but I was so ashamed of what I've done. I couldn't bear the

thought of facing you after the hurt I caused. I told myself Robert would return, and we would collect Alice and be a happy family. But months and then years passed. Robert has not been faithful to me. He left us to fend for ourselves. I had to go into service to support myself and give my darling little daughter away. Hardship and illness have followed me all these years, and I've never been able to reclaim her.

In these last few weeks, my health has taken a bad turn. I've been so ill I'm not able to work or rise from my bed. The money is gone. My few friends have turned away. I am afraid I won't recover. Will you come and let me make amends before it's too late?

I pray you can find it in your heart to visit me. Then I hope you will go to the Foundling Hospital, reclaim Alice, and give her the home and life she deserves. Please come quickly. I live at 237 Miller's Court, second floor, Number 2, White Chapel, London.

*Forever your loving sister,
Serena*

Tears misted Lillian's vision, blurring the words on the page. *Oh, Serena, how can this be true?*

She stared at her sister's address, her heartache increasing. Serena's choices had taken her down a painful road. But she was not the only one who had suffered in the last nine years. Serena didn't know their mother had passed away not long after Serena left. Nor was she aware that Lillian had become a widow and lost a child . . . a child she could never hope to reclaim.



Two hours later, Lillian's carriage rolled to a stop. She looked out the window, and her heart twisted. The row of decrepit

buildings lining the street looked like those poverty-stricken hovels described in a Charles Dickens novel. How could her sister have fallen so low?

Ben Fields, her coachman, stepped into view, wearing a concerned frown. "Are you certain this is the correct place, ma'am?"

She spied the small sign with the number 237 hanging above the doorway. "If this is Miller's Court, then yes, I'm afraid it is."

He opened the carriage door. "Shall I go in with you, ma'am?"

"No, thank you. Please wait here. I'm not sure how long I'll be." She hesitated, then said, "I may need your help."

Surprise flashed in his eyes, but he nodded and offered his hand as she descended from the carriage.

She took one step, and her foot slipped on the slick cobblestone street. The coachman reached out and steadied her. She looked down at the muck smeared on the side of her shoe and grimaced, not wishing to identify the brown sludge. Visiting White Chapel was not for the faint of heart.

She entered the old building, stopped in the hallway, and waited for her eyes to adjust to the dim light. Broken crates, tin cans, and piles of old newspapers lay on the hallway floor. She stepped around them and climbed two flights of creaking stairs to the second floor. When she reached the upper landing, she spied three doors. The number two was scratched into the dark wood of the middle door.

"Give me courage, Lord," she whispered, then approached the door and knocked three times. A few seconds passed, and no one answered. She turned the knob and found the door unlocked. Opening it a few inches, she leaned closer. "Serena, it's Lillian. May I come in?"

"Lillian?" Her sister's voice sounded weak and strained.

"Yes, dear. It's me." She entered and quickly scanned the room. Her sister lay on a narrow bed in the corner, curled up

under an old gray blanket. Alarm shot through Lillian as she crossed toward her. Serena's face appeared flushed, and her blond hair lay in stringy locks on the dirty pillow.

Her sister looked up through glassy blue eyes. "I hoped you would come."

Lillian's throat tightened. "I'm glad you sent word. I would've come sooner if I'd known you were ill." She knelt beside the bed and gently brushed her sister's damp hair back from her face. Heat radiated into her fingers. "You have a fever." She spotted a glass of water on the bedside table and offered it to Serena.

Her sister struggled to raise herself enough to drink. Lillian held the glass to her lips, and after a few sips, Serena coughed several times, sounding as if she could barely catch her breath, then she sank back on the pillow.

"Has the doctor come? What did he say?"

She wheezed. "I've no money for a doctor."

Her sister's labored breathing sent fear crawling up Lillian's spine. She quickly scanned the sparse room. A round table, a rickety-looking chair, and two crates were her sister's only furnishings. A small, square window with dirty glass let in little light. There was no fireplace or stove to keep the room warm, although lack of warmth was not her sister's current problem. How could anyone recover from an illness, alone, in a room like this?

Lillian turned to Serena. "I have my carriage waiting downstairs. I'll pack your things, and you can come home with me."

Serena's brow knit. "But what will your husband say? Will he allow it?"

A pang pierced Lillian's heart. "Stephen . . . is no longer with us."

Serena's eyes widened. "What?"

"His ship went down in the North Sea five months after you left."

“Oh, Lillian. I’m so sorry. I didn’t know.”

Lillian swallowed hard. Although eight years had passed since Stephen’s death, mentioning it brought pain to the surface. They had only been married a short time, but she had loved him deeply, and he had loved her. She forced those thoughts away and focused on her sister once more.

“I’ll pack your things, then I’ll have my coachman come and help you downstairs.” Her sister had few belongings. It wouldn’t take long to fill the two crates and clear the room.

“I don’t deserve your kindness, not after everything I’ve done.” Serena’s whispered words sent her into a coughing fit.

Lillian shook her head. “There’s no need to think about that now. I’m sure you’ll feel quite comfortable in my home, and you’ll be well in no time.” She forced optimism into her voice.

Within five minutes, she’d collected everything in the room and helped her sister put on a robe.

Serena pulled in a raspy breath. “Please look under the bed. There’s a small wooden box.”

Lillian knelt and pushed the blanket aside. Reaching under, she searched until she found the box.

“Open it, please,” Serena said.

Lillian lifted the hinged lid. Inside lay folded papers, a ribbon, and a few coins.

“Those are Alice’s papers from the Foundling Hospital. You’ll need them when you go reclaim her.”

Lillian’s breath caught in her throat as she unfolded the top paper and scanned the words.

Date of entry: 18 September 1877. Female infant. Three months old. Birth name: Alice Catherine Dunsmore. Mother: Serena Faith Crosby.

Lillian stared at the words. The use of Serena’s surname confirmed the worst. Her sister had run away with Dunsmore, but she had never married him. She read on.

Father: Robert John Dunsmore, Corporal in the 7th Queen's Own Hussars. Child's date of birth: 14 June 1877. Place of birth: White Chapel, London. Mother left a round golden token with the words Remember My Love inscribed on the front and tied with a red ribbon through a top center hole.

A flood of emotion swirled through Lillian as she looked up and met Serena's gaze. How could her sister birth and nurse a child for three months, not counting the months she carried her inside, and then give her up? She tried to restrain her feelings, but it was impossible. "Why didn't you let me help you?"

Serena looked down. "I thought Alice would be safe at the Foundling Hospital until Robert returned. Then we would marry and reclaim her."

"But when you realized he wasn't coming back, you could've come home." Lillian's voice grew more intense. "I don't understand."

Serena shook her head as tears filled her eyes. "How could I come home? I knew you despised me for hurting Mother and bringing shame on our family."

Lillian pulled back as though she'd been struck. "Of course we were hurt and concerned when you disappeared, but I never despised you. I wanted to help. I love you."

Serena's face crumpled. "Truly? You still love me?"

"Yes." Lillian reached for Serena's hand. "I could tell from your letter all was not well. I searched for Robert's family and learned where his military unit was stationed. I wrote to him, and he replied, insisting he didn't know where you were."

Tears overflowed her sister's eyes. "He knew very well where we were. Why would he say that?" She coughed again, then groaned and rolled to her side.

Lillian placed her hand on Serena's shoulder. This was not the time to try and straighten out all that had happened. "We

don't need to talk about it now. Let's focus on the present and helping you get well."

Serena sniffed. "Thank you."

Lillian rose. "I'll take a crate downstairs and bring the coachman up to help us."

"Wait. There's one more thing you need to know."

Lillian turned back. "Yes?"

"Before Alice was born, Robert gave me a love token. He had one that matched. I left mine with Alice at the Foundling Hospital. It's mentioned in those papers." She pulled in a shaky breath, sorrow weighing down each word. "Robert sent his back. It's in the bottom of the box."

Lillian lifted the other papers and found the round golden token beneath. She studied the inscription on the front in flowing script. *Remember My Love*. Two small hearts and swirling vines surrounded the words.

She clenched her jaw, fighting off the wave of anger and regret. It seemed Serena had remembered her love for Robert and their daughter, but Robert had abandoned and forgotten those he'd claimed to love.



The coachman carried Serena upstairs to Lillian's largest guest room. Lillian helped her settle into a chair and summoned their maid. While the maid gave Serena a sponge bath and rinsed her sister's hair, Lillian wrote a quick note and asked the coachman to deliver it to the doctor. She retrieved a fresh nightgown from her room, then helped Serena slip it on and climb into the feather bed.

Lillian tucked a light blanket around her sister, leaned down, and kissed her forehead. It was still hot, making it clear her fever had not abated.

Serena released a shaky breath and closed her eyes. "Thank you," she said softly.

“Rest now. I’ll collect a few things, then come back and sit with you.” Lillian waited for Serena to reply, but her sister appeared to have drifted off to sleep. Concern flared in Lillian’s chest. The move had been necessary, but it seemed to have drained what little strength Serena had left.

Would her sister recover? She swallowed hard and set off down the hall, a prayer for mercy and healing rising from her heart. She added a plea to know how best to help her sister and niece.

She found Mrs. Pringle and asked her to have the cook prepare some nourishing broth and send up tea. Continuing down the hall, she considered her sister’s request that she go to the Foundling Hospital and reclaim her daughter. It was nearly five o’clock, and the doctor was expected soon. She would wait to speak with him, then go to the Foundling Hospital first thing tomorrow morning.

Descending the stairs, she recalled the Foundling Hospital was a respected charity, with a long history of taking in infants whose mothers could not care for them. She’d given several generous donations in the past, never knowing her niece might have benefitted from those gifts.

She entered the library and gathered her Bible, pen, and the speech she’d been writing when her sister’s message had arrived. She doubted she could gather her thoughts to continue writing, but she had to try. The meeting was only a few days away.

The front bell rang, and she heard Stanford answer the door. She met the butler and Dr. Frasier in the entry hall.

The doctor nodded to her. “Good evening, Mrs. Freemont.”

“Thank you for coming, Doctor.” She motioned to the right. “My sister is upstairs in the guest room. If you’ll follow me.”

They climbed the stairs, and she showed him into her sister’s room. “Dr. Frasier, this is my sister, Serena Crosby. She has a fever and cough and is quite weak. I’m not sure how long she’s been ill.”

Serena didn't stir as the doctor crossed to her bed. He placed his black leather bag on the bedside table, then he gently roused Serena, questioned her, and conducted his examination. Serena spoke softly between coughs, answering his questions in a shaky voice.

Finally, he turned to Lillian. "I believe she has pneumonia, an acute infection of the lungs. She'll need care for some time. Shall I send for a nurse?"

"No. I'll oversee her care myself. Please tell me what's needed."

He nodded. "Give her plenty of liquids, broth, peppermint tea, and soup. Try to calm the cough with warm water, and tea with lemon and honey. She needs to rest as much as possible. Cool her with damp cloths and only cover her with a light blanket." He took out his pocket watch and consulted the time. "I have another call to make, but I'll come back in the morning before ten. If she worsens, send word."

Lillian nodded, trying not to let his final fearful words steal her hope.

He glanced at Serena, then back at Lillian. "Take heart, Mrs. Freemont. With prayer and good nursing, I believe your sister will recover."

"Thank you." Lillian pushed those words past her tight throat.

He sent her a brief smile. "I'll see myself out."

She thanked him again and crossed to her sister's bed. Serena's cheeks were still flushed, but she seemed more peaceful. "Did you hear the doctor? He said you have pneumonia, but he believes you will get better."

Serena's chin trembled. "It's more than I deserve . . . after what I've done."

Lillian knelt and looked into her sister's eyes. "We all have