

DEENA

Face of Fear

An expanded version of the award-winning
Heartsong Presents title
IN LIZZY'S IMAGE

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C_R Publications

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Carolyn R. Scheidies' credits include over two-dozen books—several of which have garnered awards and contributions to several non-fiction books. A graduate of the University of Nebraska (UNK) with a degree in journalism, she's written for a variety of publications, and has a regular column in the Kearney Hub. Scheidies also speaks to different groups on a variety of topics, leads workshops on writing, and guest lectures at UNK.

What readers said about *In Lizzy's Image*

Writer/Speaker Kathy Collard Miller: *You did a great job. I loved all the different twists and how you brought out more and more information as it went along. Great job! What fun to read!* Kathy C. Miller <http://www.larryandkathy.com>

I enjoyed it a lot. In fact, I liked it so much that I'm reading it for the tenth time! Thanks again! Sincerely, Anna Garey

This enjoyable story becomes especially interesting when small accidents escalate, putting her life in danger. Diane Johnson--Romantic Times

The road toward resolution is bumpy and faith is tested by the individuals involved, but the journey is well worth traveling. RENEZVOUS August 1998

Dedication

To Laura Sherwood

Thanks for all the prayer, support and encouragement.

Carolyn R Scheidies

Prologue

Flipping back her long silvery-blond hair, Deena frowned at her image in the mirror. In the worn gown of mourning black, she looked far too young, far too vulnerable for her nineteen years.

First with the death of her mother and now her father, the future stretched out a frightening unknown. Frightening, but for the thread of hope within, not only because of the optimism of youth, but also from her steadfast trust in her Heavenly Father--the father who wouldn't let her down. Or hadn't until now.

Grimacing, she stared back into the mirror only to freeze as her eyes caught the reflection of her sister staring at her over her shoulder into the mirror. The stunning features of the older sister darkened threateningly.

Flinching, Deena swung about. "Elizabeth...Beth, what are you doing here?"

Struggling for composure, Deena searched the room. "Lord, what does it mean? Beth can't be here. She's in America with her husband, isn't she?"

Even as fear nagged, Isaiah 41:10 flashed in her heart. "*Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God:*"

CHAPTER ONE

While Deena gazed with trepidation around her room, the family solicitor and friend, Orrin Worth, paced the small book-lined study, which gave evidence of its recently departed master. Legal documents splayed across the hardwood desk. Several quills, in an embossed silver holder, awaited his return.

Orrin gathered the papers and methodically began to sort them, his slightly stooped, balding figure hunched over even further at the unpleasant task. A sigh escaped his tight lips. He moved, straightened as though trying, unsuccessfully to unload the burden that lay heavy on a rather average frame. He ran a slow hand through the remains of his reddish-brown hair, making the graying ends about his ears stand up like the hairs on a frightened cat.

There were times he hated being a solicitor, this being one of them. As the ornate doors to the study opened, Orrin glanced up. At the sight of the tall, almost gaunt woman who entered, he exhaled. A smile of relief flashed across his solemn face. Too quickly he lurched to his feet and had to catch at the shabby desk chair behind him to keep it from clattering to the floor. Coming around the desk, he reached out his hands. "Miss Margaret!"

The woman, several years younger than the solicitor, flushed. Lowering her dark eyes, she shyly placed her hands in his. A sigh pushed its way through her lips.

"What is it Miss Margaret?" Orrin asked urgently,

short of breath at the mere touch of her warm white hands.

Dear, what would she think of him, a man of over four and forty years acting like some callow youth? It was not as though he had never held a woman in his arms. His grip tightened as painful memories flitted through his mind.

It had been three years since, since the death of his wife Sylvia. Despite her pessimistic nature, Sylvia had basically been a good woman. But that was behind him.

“Miss Margaret?” The younger woman raised her head. As their gazes locked, the whole world faded away, leaving them alone, together, in a place of sunshine and love.

Orrin broke the spell first, reluctantly. He cleared his throat. “Margaret, I was expecting Lady Heyford.” Remembering suddenly he still held Margaret’s hands, Orrin released them.

Blushing, Margaret smiled. “Lady Heyford will be down shortly. I think she’s stalling to give me...us time...” She blushed even more furiously, before stammering. “Wi...wish you tea?”

Orrin smiled as he gazed at Margaret, seeing her as the young debutante she had never been. His lips tightened at the injustice of it all. Then again, had she had her season, she would not now be here--for him.

“I’d like that...Margaret. Thank you.”

Deena Heyford swung her long silver-blond hair off her shoulder. Tied back with a silver cord, the soft silky hair reached past her tiny waist. She liked the feel of it down her back, knowing it was one of her vanities. She bounced down the hall to the study.

Opening the door and with a decided pang, she recalled a time when footmen stood ready to open any door, and housemaids bustled about the castle-like Tudor manor keeping dust from the furniture, off the armor decorating the landings and off the many heirlooms that used to fill the dark manor with a warmth it now lacked.

For a moment Deena shivered, then, firmly straightening her narrow shoulders, she walked through the heavy oak door. Orrin stopped mid-sentence when he saw her. Deena wondered if her two dear friends had yet made definite plans for a future together. The two gave no sign. Orrin strode forward to greet her. Taking her small delicate hand in his, he bowed. "Lady Heyford."

Deena giggled. "Really Orrin, why so formal? You've known me since I was in leading strings." She observed him through mischievous gray eyes as she permitted him to seat her into a comfortable, if shabby, blue velvet wingback chair facing the large bulky desk.

"I should go," said Margaret turning toward the door.

Orrin raised a restraining hand as he retreated behind the desk. "This concerns you too, Margaret."

Exchanging a puzzled glance with Deena, Margaret nonetheless continued toward the door. "As you wish Mr. Worth...Orrin, let me first bring tea."

The solicitor stared after the gracefully departing figure. At his besotted expression, Deena tried to still the giggle that tickled her throat.

The giggle died as she thought of the long dark halls of her home, the only home she had ever known. It was empty now of servants except for the rheumatic Bently who

was too old and infirm to continue as butler, Mrs. Havers, the housekeeper, and, now, also cook, and her grandson Harley.

Deena shook her head almost feeling the ancient structure groaning from years of neglect. She sighed. She did not even know if Uncle Alfors wished to return from India to take over his title as Baron Manfred, now that her father was gone.

Margaret's reentrance brought her somber thoughts to an abrupt halt. "Here we are," Margaret said, setting the large tray on the desk and pouring out the tea. "Met Mrs. Havers in the hall with the tray. She was muttering about how everything has come to rack and ruin since you let the staff go." There was no censure in her tone, but Lady Deena responded.

"It was necessary." Lifting the delicate china cup, Deena noticed the chip in the plate. Gone was the fine Sevres china and the blue Jasper Wedgewood tea set, gone the family's crested silver, gone along with her home, her security and her future. *Lord*, she cried silently. *When is Uncle Alfors coming home? There is no money, and I worry about our retainers. They're too old to get other work.*

Feeling the eyes of the solicitor upon her, Deena glanced up, catching the compassion in his face. Putting his tea cup down carefully, Orrin clasped his hand in a posture Deena recognized as his "serious business pose." Without turning her head, she knew Margaret, sitting in the chair opposite hers, waited tensely, her eyes on the man she had come to respect and to love.

"Lady Heyford, I regret to inform you that the estate is without financial resources." He shuffled papers on the

desk, clearing it for other papers of his own, before carefully picking one up. From the creases in the parchment, Deena assumed it to be a letter and waited, rather impatiently, for the methodical solicitor to reveal its contents.

“I fear, Lord Alfors Heyford has no intention of returning to England in the near future. He and his family are happily settled in India. He is expecting a promotion and has little interest in a “bankrupt estate and crumbling manor” as he puts it.” Orrin cleared his throat. “Or anything else.”

Absently, Deena glanced down at the worn carpet noting a small hole next to the splayed leg of the desk. She knew what Orrin was kindly trying to tell her. Uncle Alfors, whom she had only met once many years earlier and remembered as a hefty, rather rough man who frightened her, had no intention of being burdened with an orphan chit just out of the schoolroom. The implications of his refusal made her heart pound; nevertheless she managed to steady herself. “What am I then to do?”

Again Orrin cleared his throat. Deena watched him glance at Margaret as though for support, then away.

“Orrin,” Margaret’s eyes mirrored her concern, “there must be something we can do.”

Deena interrupted, “Margaret, you’re now without a position or income and are, in truth, as destitute as I am. I can’t expect you to continue watching out for me.”

Deena’s innocent face and large gray eyes questioned the solicitor from an oval face with its pert nose and well formed mouth.

“Lady Deena you are far too young to meet the

challenge facing you. How could anyone be so unfeeling as to leave you without protection?" he muttered, but Deena heard.

"You have a sister in the colonies, I believe," he began.

Margaret interrupted hurriedly, "surely you're not considering sending her to Beth!"

Frowning, the solicitor faltered a moment. "She is the only other living relative, and that makes her Lady Deena's rightful guardian. I really have no other choice, Margaret."

"But Beth never cared for Lady Deena," Margaret burst out, biting her lip at her hasty words as pain flashed across Deena's open face.

"It has been at least ten years." Orrin reminded patiently. "Beth is now a wife and mother. I am sure petty childhood squabbles have been long forgotten."

"Were they?" murmured Margaret to Deena. "Did Beth ever think of or ever repent of her insensitivity and worse not only to her immediate family, but to her friends...her best friend? Childhood squabbles indeed."

Orrin pulled her attention back to the present. "I have worked it out. After pensioning Bently and Mrs. Havers, closing down the estate and selling what is left of what is salable, I think there will be enough to send you to the states."

"Not alone!" Margaret echoed Deena's thoughts.

"Dash it, Margaret! Surely you do not think me so addle-patted as all that!" Disappointment momentarily shone on Orrin's face.

Margaret lowered her eyes. "Forgive me, Orrin. It's

just....”

“I understand your concern, dear.” The endearment slipped out, making Deena grin and Margaret blush.

“Margaret, I want you to accompany Lady Deena.”

Deena read consternation in her companion’s gold-flecked brown eyes. “Do you think Mr. Stern will welcome me?” Margaret clenched her hands.

Deena glanced over at her worriedly. *Surely Worth did not realize the import of his words on her companion and friend. La, he did!*

With a moan, Orrin swung around the desk. Kneeling before Margaret, he clasped her trembling hands in his. “No, Dearest, I do not mean you to stay. After you see Deena safely to her sister, you return to England...to me. You must return. Margaret, I want you as my wife.”

Margaret’s eyes widened. “Truly, Orrin, truly?”

“I love you,” he said firmly. Please don’t make me live any longer without you.”

“Oh. Orrin,” Margaret blinked away tears of happiness.

“Stuff and feathers, Margaret. When are you going to say yes?” interrupted Deena with all the impatience of youth.

Orrin and Margaret exchanged an embarrassed glance. Still the solicitor held Margaret’s hand. “Well.”

“Orrin, I love you. La, I will be honoured to be your wife.”

Stilling a giggle, Deena observed him try to amend his shattered dignity as he stood, brushed off the knees of his tight fitting pantaloons and returned stiffly to his chair behind the desk. For all the uncertainty of her own position,

joy surged through her for Margaret's dream come true. She'd been in love with the solicitor for an age it seemed. Fleeting, she wondered if she would ever feel so strongly about a man.

The solicitor cleared his throat. "I will send a letter immediately to Mrs. Stern to acquaint her with her new responsibilities."

As the import of Mr. Worth's statement sank in, Deena's joy faded into well concealed dread.

Deena limped away from the waves splashing over the ship's railing. Though she enjoyed feeling the salty spray wash over her, liked the feel of the breeze rippling her hair, trying to maintain her balance on the rocking deck made her right leg ache. She rubbed it now absently, praying it would not give out on her as it sometimes did; usually when she least expected it to happen.

Grimacing, she remembered, as though it all happened in slow motion, schooling her spirited black gelding over the wall. He refused. At the last moment he took the jump only to lose his balance and throw her, excellent rider though she was, over the jump. Crashing down on the other side, she blacked out. It was only much later she learned her horse broke his back and had to be destroyed.

Her own leg had been shattered, and Deena had not walked again for over six months. Eventually she had recovered, but her right leg remained weak. She leaned against a deck chair in which Margaret sat.

The other woman, seeing her, jumped up, her finger still in the latest Walter Scott novel she had been reading.

“Deena, dear. Here, let me help you sit down.”

With a slight smile of apology, Deena forced herself to relax, ignoring the cramping pain shooting through her hip and down her leg. Though Margaret appeared once more absorbed in her book, Deena knew her companion watched her anxiously. *Rather like a mother hen*, she thought wryly.

Margaret asked softly, “Want to go to your cabin?”

Stubbornly Deena shook her head. “A moment. I’ll be fine.”

“Fustian!” Margaret said. “You’ve been walking the deck the last two hours. You know that leg won’t stand up to that.”

Deena glanced away, focused on the well-turned out gentleman strolling by. Seeing them, the man inclined his head, stopped, forestalling the retort hovering on Deena’s lips.

The man, dressed in the first stare of fashion, appeared to be in his mid thirties. A large fob hung from a gold chain, and his hands bore several flashy rings.

His eyes roved over the two women. Dismissing the gaunt Margaret he focused on Deena. “Lady Deena.”

Unobtrusively, he adjusted his cravat. Deena stilled the giggle tickling her throat. The man’s neck points were so high the man could scarcely bend his head to look at her without being stabbed in the cheek.

“Clyde Porter at your service, Milady.” He bent over the gloved hand she held out to him. So long did he hold it, that Deena, angered, tugged it away. Irritatingly, the man but smiled.

“Quickly Man, bring another chair.” Porter

commanded a deck hand, with an aristocratic hauteur Deena despised.

As a chair was set up beside her and the man sat down, Deena's lips tightened at the deck hand's comment. "I see you've found Lady Deena, Mr. Porter."

So that was it. She was spared his attentions only as long as he thought her beneath him. Strange what a title did to some people.

Though that day on deck she liked him little enough, she could not quite bring herself to rudeness. In the days that followed she wished she had not been so polite. Ignoring Margaret, he continually found excuses to be near Deena, flattering her outrageously. His attentions made her uncomfortable, but she had no notion of the entrancing picture she made with her pixie-like face, large gray eyes framed by that startling silver-blond hair. Once again, she plastered a smile on her face as she acknowledged Porter. He was not reticent about revealing that, though he was an American, he was heir to an English knighthood.

"I am most delighted that you plan to reside in my fair land, Milady," he drawled. The look she gave her sent thin shivers down Deena's back.

"After all, we Americans are simply transplanted Englishmen. Many are as cultured as any English aristocrat."

He reached for her hand, but, expecting the move, Deena demurely shoved her hands beneath her lap robe. Fervently, she wished Mr. Porter elsewhere. No matter where she went on the ship she felt he invaded her privacy, and she dreaded her frequent encounters with the arrogant American.

His smile never quite reached his lustful dark eyes. Leaning away from him, she touched Margaret's shoulder, her agitation communicating itself to her companion.

Standing, Margaret resolutely motioned for a deck hand to take the chairs. "Come, Milady, it is time to retire to our cabin."

"La, Miss Hastings. Of course." Getting up she turned to Mr. Porter. "Excuse me." She got no further, "Come now, Lady Deena Heyford...Deena." Deena winced at the undesired familiarity. "Surely you can stay and talk with me. I am interested in your destination. Mayhap I might visit."

Inwardly Deena shrunk back from the thought. She desired no further contact with the man she was beginning to feel was somewhat less than a true gentleman. She was thankful, too, Orrin had made her promise not to speak too freely and to keep her future to herself.

He had warned her against her own innocent inclinations to answer any question without considering motives on the part of the inquirer. She shuttered thinking how otherwise Porter would have known exactly where to find her in the states. Silently, she breathed a prayer of thankfulness.

Even as she allowed Margaret to take her arm, resentment flared toward the man who had so intruded into her peace. Once in their cabin, Margaret sputtered. "The utter nerve of that man. I'll be glad when I land you safe at Three Oaks. Good thing Orrin still had that letter from Beth, but it was dated some time past."

"I only hope she's changed." Deena sighed. "I'll have no one to turn to if..."

Margaret grimaced. “Anyway, I’ll be glad to get you away from that awful man. I don’t trust him. There is just something about him...something I dislike...not quite a gentleman, I think, despite being dressed in the mode.”

Lying down on her narrow bed, Deena let Margaret vent her wrath as her own mind wondered. Somehow she had to find some way to avoid Mr. Porter, (she refused to call him Clyde as he demanded), who continually encroached on her serenity. He seemed to hover over her like some kind of vulture.

Vulture. That was not quite descriptive of the man. She’d seen the eyes of the women passengers follow him. Grudgingly, she admitted he pleased the eyes, certainly, she thought cynically, his own. Though not particularly tall, his shoulders were broad, his body well put together. So what did bother her? Should she not be flattered by his attentions?

Almost she snorted. Definitely not! There was something that made her distinctly uncomfortable in his presence. Truth to tell, there were times she felt positively undressed under his probing gaze. Stuff and feathers, how fanciful! She tried to shrug off the foreboding filling her at the thought of continued contact.

Goodness, if the attentions of one dandy so set her in a spin, however would she conduct herself in polite society? She winced under the imagined scorn in the face of her sister at her inability to cope in the social whirl Beth lived and breathed.

Society. Deena should have had her season two years past, but Mamma...her lovely, laughing mother. A soft smile perched on Deena’s lips. The Baroness had been a

plump, vital lady known for her long solitary walks even in the dead of winter. The Baroness slipped on ice and had lain outside for half a day before anyone missed her. She lingered for nearly two weeks before succumbing to fever and chills, leaving the Baron distraught.

For months he mourned, moping about the manor in shock, scarcely acknowledging his daughter. The shock of losing his beloved wife so soon after the death of his only son, and heir, to Napoleon's troops in the final days of the war had been too much. Looking back, Deena realized she should not have been so staggered when the loving responsible father she had known returned to the London haunts of his impetuous youth, and began to gamble....

Even before his death, she felt her world crumbling about her. With the entrance of Porter, her idyllic sea voyage followed suit. Continually, she found herself hounded by the predatory presence of the arrogant American. Invariably, he invaded her solitary strolls on deck. Time and again, Deena changed the time and direction of her walks, but whether at sunrise, morning, afternoon, or after sunset, sooner or later Porter fell into step beside her.

"Mr. Porter, this is outside of enough." Exasperation boiled into anger.

"Clyde, if you please, Deena."

Deena frowned at his familiarity. "MR. Porter, surely you have better things to do than trail me."

He laughed, unaffected by her reproach. "Ah, pretty little filly, I like it when you're angry."

The look in his eyes made Deena glance about apprehensively. She was about to turn back when Porter

imprisoned her in his arms. "Such a charming miss," he drawled, smiling laconically into the angry, then fearful face of the young woman.

He chuckled as she unsuccessfully struggled against his hold. "Let me go!" Again she glanced around hopefully.

"No one will hear you over the roaring of this wind." His thick sensuous lips drew close to hers.

"Lord, help me!" Deena cried, never knowing later whether or not she cried aloud. It mattered not, for an idea sprang to mind. Against all reason, Deena slumped in his arms. When Porter shifted to take the brunt of her weight, Deena straightened, twisted from his grasp. Eyes flashing, she drew back her foot and slammed it into his ankle with such force she felt she had broken her toes.

Porter's wowl of pain made it worthwhile. Swiftly Deena left him, praying her leg would not play her false. Huffing from exertion, she entered her cabin. Slamming the door behind her, she leaned against it panting.

Margaret glanced up with concern. "Deena, are you all right? What happened? Porter?" At Deena's nod, her visage darkened. "We must speak to the captain of this. We must not let this continue."

Deena collapsed on her bed. Haltingly, she explained to Margaret, who sat down beside her. Her companion's face registered shock. "I knew the man was not a gentleman! Treating you like some light skirt!" She put a comforting arm about the trembling girl. "If this is any measure of these American men. I'll take you back with me!"

Shakily Deena smiled. "Right. Soon, I'll need never see the man again."

Margaret released her charge. “Thank the Lord for that!” Neither spoke of the real concern. Mayhap there would be no welcome at Three Oaks, not unless Beth had indeed changed, and for the better. *Indeed*, Deena thought, *Beth would have to be a different person*. She closed her eyes. Again she felt that sense of foreboding, only this time it had nothing to do with the erstwhile “gentleman.”

“God,” she whispered, “why? Why are you doing this to me?”