
Lord Highwayman (Cursed Treasure Book 5)

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DEDICATION

To my lovely editor JoAnne and my readers, thank you for all your support.

Lord Highwayman (Cursed Treasure Book 5)

LORD HIGHWAYMAN

Cursed Treasure, 4

Raven McAllan

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Chapter One

Get me out of the city.

Why do people think a crush like this is enjoyable?

What on earth does he have that makes him appealing?

Who needs a husband? I'd prefer a cat.

Lud, I am a cat.

Pay the price...

No Lord Highwayman (Cursed Treasure Book 5) please, Lord Highwayman (Cursed Treasure Book 5) not that... Marielle's thoughts were enough to make her giddy. It was time to retreat.

Away from the overcrowded rooms, the Lord Highwayman (Cursed Treasure Book 5) cattiness, the gossip and the sheer sights, aromas and irritations of the season. Before she lost her patience, let alone allowed her temper to take over from caution and create a scandal. Marielle turned on her heels, pleaded a headache to her hostess and left the ballroom, thankful her mama wasn't around to give her 'the look'. The one that conveyed reproach, sorrow and irritation, and which her brother Dare said made him want to own up to anything and everything. Marielle tended to agree with him. Their Lord Highwayman (Cursed Treasure Book 5) mother Lord Highwayman (Cursed Treasure Book 5) did 'the look' so well. However she was at Lady Rotherham's ball, not this one, and not around to see Marielle retreat.

Three days later, armed with excuses Lord Highwayman (Cursed Treasure Book 5) and now ready to argue with Susie, her personal maid, Lady Marielle Birch thought how lucky it was her parents had agreed with her and let her arrange her getaway. Lord Highwayman (Cursed Treasure Book 5) *Why* they were so agreeable she wasn't sure, but chose not to enquire, just in case her mama had an ulterior motive, something she often did. However, Marielle needed space to think. To plot, plan, sort out her life and help restore her family's fortunes. This was the only way she thought it might be possible.

Pay the price... She blocked her Lord Highwayman (Cursed Treasure Book 5) treacherous thoughts and concentrated on how best to pacify her maid and allay her worries.

“I’ll be fine, it’s naught but a few miles,” Marielle said, as she did her best to curb her impatience. Now that she’d Lord Highwayman (Cursed Treasure Book 5) left the smells and the annoyances of London well behind, she wanted nothing more than to continue her journey in haste. “Jeremy and Patterson are on the box. I have a pistol, and you, Susie, have a right to spend the night with your mama. She needs you, and let’s be honest: in all honesty I do not.” Brutal, but nothing less than the truth. Marielle had decided at an Lord Highwayman (Cursed Treasure Book 5) early age she needed to be able to fend for herself. Her pistol was to hand and thanks to her brother, Dare, not only was she an excellent shot, she knew several ways to protect herself. More importantly in Marielle’s mind was the fact that she knew how much Susie was needed at home.

“I will have no arguments, Susie. You must stay here for a while. Several days, in fact until you are honestly sure all is well.”

Lord Highwayman (Cursed Treasure Book 5)

“But the Lord Highwayman (Cursed Treasure Book 5) niceties, m’lady.” Susie, young, stubborn, chubby and conscientious, almost wrung her hands. “You’re unwed and you’ll be alone.”

Marielle bit back a sigh. Sometimes, she thought, the servants were more particular with regards to the standards and etiquette of the ton, than the ton themselves.

“There is no earthly reason why anyone other than ourselves should ever know about that,” she said firmly. Susie still looked uneasy. “Heavens, Susie.” Marielle put as much assertion Lord Highwayman (Cursed Treasure Book 5) in her voice as she could without sounding shrewish. She didn’t want to alienate her maid, but she intended to get her point over. She was the one who made the decisions, not her maid, coachman or the woodcutter they had just passed. “We’re away from the village, right alongside your mama’s cottage and well outside of the orbit of any member of the ton who should chance on me alone and thus have the opportunity to ruin my reputation.” She wanted to Lord Highwayman (Cursed Treasure Book 5) giggle. In her eyes, to be shunned by the ton would be no hardship. She could retire to a village, read novels, never wear corsets, and have cats.

“Plus,” she continued, warming to her theme, “it is not much more than an hour or so drive to Lady Foxton’s home. Good heavens, you can nigh on see her entrance gates from here.” Somewhat of an exaggeration, but that apart there was enough truth in Marielle’s speech for Susie to smile, let her breath out in a whoosh, and nod in gratitude.

“Well, if you’re sure, m’lady, it would be helpful.” Poor Susie sounded torn between her commitment to Marielle and devotion to her mother. “Just so I can see how things go on and discover what might need to be done. I’d worry otherwise. My mam? She’s so stubborn. Ever since my pa died she’s tried to be everything to all of us. Well, in this day and age it’s not easy. That was why she caught the germs going round you know, and can’t shake them off. So once I’m settled in my mind she’s not overdoing it, I’ll rest easy. Mind you, whatever, I’ll be with you later tonight.”

“You will not,” Marielle said, adamantly. “Several days is not overnight. I do not expect to see

you in under a sennight, longer if need be. Whatever or no whatever. Lady Foxtan will have a maid to help me until we both, and I stress both, know your mother is capable of looking after herself. I'll be with my godmama in time for dinner, and you will be here with your mama. Seven days, at the minimum, I insist. Your mama deserves some cossetting. Now shoo, for even though Lady Foxtan will not mind if I am late arriving, I don't want to make her late to bed, or disturb the servants to feed me. We both know my godmama. She won't hold dinner back, Lord Highwayman (Cursed Treasure Book 5) so the sooner I get there the less upheaval to the household."

Lady Foxtan was adamant that in the country they ate at six, come what may. She was, she declared on many occasions, too old to have hunger pangs and to eat any time after six when she was in the country would give her those, plus indigestion. It didn't mean she retired early. On the contrary she was, she informed Marielle, always a night owl and didn't hold with those namby-pamby women who took to their beds before the witching hour. Lady Foxtan was somewhat forthright and Marielle loved Lord Highwayman (Cursed Treasure Book 5) her almost as much as she did Mijo, her mama.

Lady Foxtan does not expect me yet. I told her it could be next week. Oh, she will be happy to see me, I know that, but if I am late? It is no matter. She won't Lord Highwayman (Cursed Treasure Book 5) be put out, she'll just smile and embrace me. As long as she eats at six.

She chose not to mention the vague arrival date to Susie. "Now, do I make myself clear?"

It was Lord Highwayman (Cursed Treasure Book 5) rare Marielle used that tone of voice to anyone. Susie dipped her head and sighed in what sounded like relief. "You do, and thank you. I'll be back as Lord Highwayman (Cursed Treasure Book 5) soon as I'm able, though." She moved toward the door of the carriage. "You Lord Highwayman (Cursed Treasure Book 5) will call on me earlier if needed, m'lady?" she asked in an earnest tone. "I'd come like a flash."

"I'd expect little else." Marielle fished in her reticule. "But I will not call. Just a moment. Here, take these notes and make sure the food you feed your maman is nourishing." She pressed a wad of notes into Susie's hand. "And do not argue. Now shoo. We both need to get on."

Susie flushed, stammered her thanks and left the coach. Marielle rapped on the roof to tell the coachman to move off and sat back on the squabs with a sigh of contentment. Being alone never worried her. In a lot Lord Highwayman (Cursed Treasure Book 5) of ways she preferred her own company to that of others, especially simpering debs and inane-comment-making males of the ton. They got incredibly peevish when she wouldn't smile at their on-dits or sallies. Marielle knew she had a reputation as obdurate and one not to suffer fools gladly, and it bothered her not one jot. If that sobriquet was what was needed to keep the idiots away, and her sane, so be it. She had a lot to think about, and problems were always easier solved when she had nothing else to worry her. Florence Foxtan was easygoing to a fault, and would let Marielle do her own things without interfering.

The silly, unfounded curse said to be on her family and their fortune—or lack of it—entered her mind and she groaned.

Pay the price. The heart of ye child to be liftin' the curse. Dare ye risk it?

Lord Highwayman (Cursed Treasure Book 5)

Such a stupid thing, but the family were on their uppers, and money was tight. Nevertheless, all six Birch children had vowed to try and resurrect the family fortunes, in whatever way they could. Idly Marielle wondered Lord Highwayman (Cursed Treasure Book 5) how her brother and sisters were faring. It had been an unspoken agreement none of them would ask Lord Highwayman (Cursed Treasure Book 5) each other or interfere, which on reflection was probably as well because she herself had no ideas whatsoever on how to do her bit.

The late afternoon sun was warm as it filtered through the carriage window and she was pleased she'd chosen to travel on. The well-sprung vehicle moved steadily toward its destination and, lulled by the smooth ride, Marielle closed her eyes. Even if her godmama didn't expect her so soon, Marielle knew a room would be ready and food would be served once she and Lady Foxton had greeted each other.

It was a pity it would be well past dusk by the time they reached her godmother's estate in the neighboring county, and later than the time she'd hoped they would arrive, but it couldn't be helped. She didn't like to put her godmother's household to the amount of upheaval her unexpected arrival would bring, but a loose wheel nut and the extra stop at Susie's home had added a good two hours to the journey. As they got closer to Foxton Hall, her Lord Highwayman (Cursed Treasure Book 5) godmama's residence, Marielle had no desire to stop elsewhere for the Lord Highwayman (Cursed Treasure Book 5) night. None of the inns in the area would suffice, especially without her maid and therefore she decided she had no option but to press on. It was lucky the moon would be almost full, and, along with the carriage lamps, would light their way. Lord Highwayman (Cursed Treasure Book 5) This part of Northamptonshire was quiet and the chances of meeting a lot of traffic slim, but it still needed care on the roads, which were not all they could be. Nevertheless, she was more than relieved they should reach their destination shortly.

Lord Highwayman Cursed Treasure Book 5

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