

Sophia

A NOVEL

To avoid scandal,
Sophia must break
all the rules.

Pure
Romance

PAULA KREMSEK

Sophia

PAULA KREMSER

SWEETWATER
BOOKS

AN IMPRINT OF CEDAR FORT, INC.
SPRINGVILLE, UTAH



One



*S*ophia Spencer bent her head over her sewing project and then leaned back again so she wouldn't block the light from the lamp to her right. She disliked sewing by lamplight, but this was the last of the dresses she had volunteered to make, and if she could finish this evening, then she could go riding tomorrow with a clear conscience. The other ladies in the neighborhood had also been sewing in their spare time over the last month so that when Reverend Henley went to Sheffield the following Monday, he could deliver the entire batch to the foundling home.

When Reverend Henley had asked the ladies in the parish to offer their services, Sophia had, of course, volunteered. She had signed up to sew six dresses—twice as many as Martha Bullock, who had signed up before her—and signed her name with a flourish. The pattern wasn't complicated, but the stitches seemed to never end. She regretted signing up for so many, but she wouldn't shirk her duty. Besides, helping orphans sounded like a good thing to do. When she had stepped into the shop yesterday and been cornered by Martha, it had sounded quite grand to announce that she couldn't possibly have prepared a song to perform at Mrs. Gibbs's because she was *so* busy making dresses for the dear orphans. Sophia always enjoyed putting Martha in her place; she just wished all this sewing hadn't taken up so much of her free time. Not the time practicing another boring song for another boring neighborhood party at Mrs. Gibbs's, but time that could have been spent outdoors riding her horse, Pearl. The weather had turned

nice two days ago, and Sophia was determined to finish the sewing tonight. She had given her time much more charitably during the last few weeks of constant rain.

Despite the weather's turn for the better, evenings were still quite chilly, and she was glad of the warmth and the light from the fire as she and her father whiled away the evening hours. Her father was reading the latest news from town and commenting occasionally on some interesting thing or other, while Sophia continued her even row of stitches.

Mr. Spencer had lived in London for a short period of his life and had maintained his habit of reading the news every week. For Sophia, it didn't mean much. She had never even seen London.

Suddenly her father sat forward in his chair and said, "Oh my goodness." This was quite the declaration of surprise from her normally subdued father. Sophia looked up in interest, but he continued reading. She knew from experience that he wouldn't communicate until he had finished reading whatever interesting article he had come across. So Sophia waited patiently for him to look up. When he did, he had a wary look, as if he was worried what her reaction would be when he told her. Her curiosity was now truly piqued, and she demanded, "Out with it, Father. What's the bad news?"

Her father shifted in his seat but got right to the point. "Well, Sophia, I'm just not at all sure how you will feel about it, but apparently your grandmother has recently passed."

Sophia leaned back in her chair and let her sewing fall to her lap. She pulled her lower lip between her teeth and thought about how she felt. She felt a tinge of sadness, but nothing at all like when Grandmother Spencer had passed away when she was ten. But she certainly wasn't relieved or happy either. Her sadness was just a regret inside her, that she hadn't ever tried to heal the rift with her mother's mother, and now there would never be an opportunity. She had somehow felt sure that she would accomplish that at some point.

She had imagined the scenario many times, with many variations. She would travel up to London and stay with a friend—a nonexistent friend at this point, but that was a minor detail—then she would happen to meet her grandmother at a fine ball, where she would be admired and talked about by all. Everyone would wonder who the new mysterious beauty was. Her grandmother would speculate along with the rest of the crowd. Then when

word reached her ears that the most elegant young woman in the room was her disowned granddaughter, she would faint dead away. And when Sophia herself produced smelling salts to revive her, Grandmother would have tears in her eyes as she begged forgiveness for her hard heart.

Tears came to Sophia's own eyes as she thought of the touching scene that would now never be.

Sophia's tears lasted only a few moments. She was sad for only what might have been, not for the passing of a woman she had never known. So she replaced the wetness in her eyes with a rueful smile. "I wish I could have known her, but she prevented it. Well, we've discussed the whole situation before; I suppose there's no need to say all the same things over again." And with that, Sophia turned back to her sewing.



Mr. Spencer had been closely watching his expressive daughter as he gave her the news of her grandmother's passing to see how she would react. The last thing he had expected was to see tears in her eyes. He had rather been expecting a bit of anger at the distant grandmother who had refused to know her only granddaughter. He had expected a quick retort of "good riddance!" rather than any sorrow.

William Spencer was reminded again that his precious daughter was really a grown woman now. Her mature reaction proved that. The evidence of it was all around him, though he tried to ignore it most of the time. Even now she was sewing away for some poor orphans, something that in the past he would have had to bribe her to do. He, too, sighed in sadness, not at the passing of his daughter's grandmother, but at the passing of time.

He watched for several moments as she continued on with her work, seemingly putting the whole thing out of her mind. This was a bit uncharacteristic of Sophia. He hated to admit that she had any faults, but if pressed he would have reluctantly said that Sophia was a bit self-absorbed. Really, the fault was probably his for spoiling her when she was young. As she entered her teenage years, it seemed to grow worse. Sophia always thought about herself first, but Mr. Spencer hadn't been overly worried.

Youth were, typically, a selfish lot. Still, he had gently been trying to direct his daughter away from these selfish tendencies. He'd had varied success.

But now, when he had fully expected her to carry on and on about the injustice of her mother's family and how unfairly they had treated her, Sophia had instead quietly accepted the situation. After bidding Sophia good night and retiring to his room, he realized that he would soon have to think about Sophia's future. But with a bit of selfishness of his own, he decided to put off thinking about that for a while. There was no rush on his part to find her a husband. He would enjoy this time with his only child for a while longer before disturbing their peaceful existence.



Two



The next morning, Sophia had completely recovered from the news. In fact, it barely crossed her mind. There were regrets, of course, but she wouldn't think about her departed grandmother today if she could help it. She had stayed up a bit late last night finishing that last dress. Now came her reward. She was going to enjoy the late spring warmth that she had been longing for through the last several weeks of rain. She was going to ride her horse.

At breakfast, Sophia checked with her father that he wouldn't need Pearl today. Father's work as a doctor kept him in the village most days, but sometimes he would need to check on a patient who lived a few miles out. Then both horses would be hitched to their old carriage, and Sophia would spend a boring day on her own two feet.

Luckily, Pearl was all hers today, and Sophia carefully folded the six dresses she had sewn and wrapped them in a parcel to deliver to Reverend Henley's home before she ventured further from the village. She hurried out to the stable after her quick breakfast and found Pearl as ready to go as she was.

Sophia was forever embarrassed about her horse's name. When she was nine years old and her father had purchased the beautiful young horse, she had been given the job of naming it. She was a lovely pearly color of white, so Sophia had named her Pearl. For years she had regretted the ridiculous name, but she didn't want to admit it to anyone. Three summers ago she

had privately called her Lightning for a while, thinking that was a much better name for a horse. One day, around that same time, she had been returning through Tissington commons from a lovely ride when her path had crossed Martha and a couple of other village girls. Staying put on the path directly in front of Sophia, Martha had remarked to her friends, “Well, if it isn’t Miss Sophia Spencer and her legendary horse . . . *Pearl*.” The other girls had giggled at Martha’s wit. But Sophia had shot her a bland smile. Her goal in life was to never let Martha goad her. Just because Martha was two years older than Sophia did not make her superior. The animosity between them was long-standing, and although Martha hit the mark by teasing Sophia about Pearl’s name, Sophia knew she couldn’t let Martha see that.

“I wouldn’t have said ‘legendary’ myself, of course,” Sophia had replied with mock humility. “But now that you’ve said it . . . well, I simply have to agree.” And with that, she’d kicked her heels to Pearl’s flanks, urging her up the steep bank and around the three girls, who let out startled screams. Sophia knew that a set-down followed by a quick departure was the best way to deal with Martha.

And so, despite the fact that Lightning was undoubtedly a better name for a legendary horse, Sophia didn’t try to call her anything other than Pearl after that.

This morning, Sophia and Pearl set off at a quick pace, both ready to enjoy the day at full speed. It didn’t last long though. The paths were quite muddy, and the ground was too soft from all the recent rain. Pearl had a hard time finding solid footing, so Sophia pulled her back to a slow trot for most of their ride. More than once, Sophia hopped off and walked her through a boggy marsh. After all her anticipation, it was a bit of a disappointing excursion. When she arrived home, she was tired and quite dirty.

The first thing she noticed upon her return was a carriage in front of her house. Sophia and her father often had visitors, but very few of them ever came in a carriage. Lord and Lady Fitzgerald had taken their children to the seaside, so it couldn’t be them. Besides, this wasn’t their carriage. She was sure she had never seen those horses before, and the carriage was a plain yet expensive one. Strange. Who could it possibly be? She had to take care of Pearl, and then she would hurry in to satisfy her curiosity.

Thomas, their servant, met her at the stable door and reached for Pearl. "Hurry up, miss. You've a visitor. I'll take Pearl, and you best get inside quick. Yer father sent me out here to wait for you, and t' tell you not to keep yer visitor waitin'."

Thomas's urgency immediately transferred to Sophia and she rushed to the house, completely forgetting both her tiredness and the fact that she was covered in dirt.



Mr. Wilson, solicitor, was surprised to find himself enjoying a discussion of the newest measures taken by Lord Grenville to unite the government. He hadn't expected to find Mr. Spencer so well informed. His expectations had been altogether low. When Lady Atkinson had come to his office, she hadn't had any nice things to say about her son-in-law. For a moment he could almost forget that he was as far away from London as he had ever been and that he was anxious to get back. He had been born and bred in London, and though he frequently traveled to his various clients at their homes in the country, it wasn't to his taste. He always returned to London as quickly as he could.

The discussion was abruptly interrupted when the door to the sitting room burst open and a person who he assumed was a maid in the household rushed in. She came to an abrupt halt as she caught sight of Mr. Wilson. Her gaze moved questioningly to Mr. Spencer. Mr. Wilson also glanced toward his host.

Mr. Spencer seemed amused as he said, "Mr. Wilson, this is my daughter, Miss Sophia Spencer." Then turning to Sophia, he said, "Sophia, this is Mr. Wilson, he is your late grandmother's solicitor. He has some news for you concerning your grandmother's will."

Mr. Wilson's first thought upon being introduced to Miss Sophia Spencer was that Lady Atkinson had made a mistake in leaving all her worldly possessions to this unknown granddaughter. He had been expecting an elegant young lady to demurely enter the parlor. He hadn't recovered

from his surprise or disappointment, but like any good solicitor, he hid this fact, cleared his throat, and said, "It's a pleasure to meet you, Miss Spencer."

For a moment she just looked back at him, apparently unsure what to say or do, and Mr. Wilson took the opportunity to assess her more fully. Her hair was a dark blonde, and most of it seemed to be uncontained. Her hazel eyes were wide, with a sparkle of curiosity in them. Her whole person seemed as though she belonged out of doors—pink cheeks, bright eyes, and a general impression of anticipation, like she was about to bounce or run. She wasn't at all like the delicate young ladies Mr. Wilson had seen all his life in London. And if he hadn't known she was eighteen, he would have guessed she was younger. She didn't look to be at all fit to manage a large fortune.

For a moment he considered just walking out without informing this uncultivated girl of Lady Atkinson's will. He knew his duty too well to truly consider such an option, but he was immensely relieved when she seemed to recollect her manners. "It is a pleasure to meet you too, Mr. Wilson. I'm sorry to have kept you waiting." She spoke elegantly, but it was her regal look as she curtsied a hello to Mr. Wilson that redeemed her in his mind; he could finally see a resemblance to Lady Atkinson.

She sat down directly across from Mr. Wilson, who wasted no time in delivering what was by then a memorized speech about how sorry he was for the loss of her dearly departed relation. He had delivered many such speeches, and usually there were tears of grief. This part always made him uncomfortable, but he found it best just to press on. He glanced at Miss Spencer, expecting to see a distraught look upon her face, but instead found that she didn't seem upset at all. Instead, curiosity and surprise were the most evident emotions.

Mr. Wilson hid his own surprise and continued, "Miss Spencer, Lady Atkinson showed her love for you to the last by naming you as her primary inheritor. She has bequeathed one thousand pounds to her daughter Lady Nora Bloomfield, who lives in London. One thousand pounds has been left to her other living daughter, Mrs. Amelia Brown, who has emigrated to America with her husband, but the will stipulates that she will only receive her inheritance if she returns to England. Your inheritance is everything remaining, which consists of investments for the most part, money in the

funds, as well as your late grandmother's London townhouse and its contents."

Mr. Wilson paused here, expecting some sort of exclamation. When Miss Spencer just looked at him with wide eyes for several moments, he again continued to tell her what had befallen her in his succinct manner. "The house is yours to use immediately, but the investments will remain as they are until you marry or reach your twenty-fifth birthday, at which point you will gain control. You will receive a stipend each month of twenty pounds until you have met the terms of the trust."

Mr. Wilson's opinion of Miss Spencer increased in favor as he informed her of the rest of the terms of Lady Atkinson's will. Throughout the rest of his speech, she nodded her acknowledgement of his words and didn't interrupt him with questions. Despite his first impression of an uncultivated young lady, he could discern an intelligent look in her eye. Finally, he concluded by saying, "So of course, Miss Spencer, after the period of mourning has passed, I shall expect to meet with you to finalize the details."

Her surprise was once more evident to him, as if mourning her grandmother had never occurred to her. But she blinked several times and nodded again before replying, "Yes, Mr. Wilson. I will look forward to meeting with you after the mourning period. I hope you will stay and dine with us."

Mr. Wilson hesitated briefly, but the return trip ahead of him would only be dreaded more if he put it off. "No, thank you, Miss Spencer. It is a long journey back to London, and I wish to make a start immediately."



Sophia's father, Mr. William Spencer, was the grandson of a baronet and entitled to the life of a gentleman. His grandfather had had six sons and three daughters. William was the son of the baronet's third daughter. He was a practical man and had realized that for him to live the life of a gentleman, he would be quite dependent on others. So he chose a profession instead and had never regretted it. Sophia's mother, Sarah, had

supported William in his decision, and as far as Sophia knew, she had never regretted it either.

Mr. Spencer was a well-respected doctor in Tissington and the surrounding villages. Most people Sophia knew looked up to her father as their superior. But when it came to the *ton* and a London Season, her father was on the very fringes. In his youth he had just stayed within fine society long enough to find Sarah Atkinson. They had quickly fallen in love and then Mr. Spencer had stolen Sarah away from the life she had led.

After Mr. Wilson's departure, Sophia and her father could talk of little besides her unexpected inheritance. As she was setting the table for their dinner, she suddenly stopped, plate in hand, and exclaimed to her father, "We should travel up to London together so I can have a Season! I never even dreamed such a thing would be possible for me, but now with grandmother's house and money, we could have a grand time there together." It was a perfect plan, and now that she thought of it, there was nothing else she wanted more.

Her hopes were quickly dashed. "I'm afraid I would be of little use to you, my dear," her father said. Sophia didn't understand why and gave him a questioning look, so he continued, "With my social situation, there wouldn't be many invitations forthcoming. Besides, I don't want to deprive the Tissington area of the best doctor in England."

This was said with a wink, and it brought a reluctant smile from Sophia. But for a while she was despondent because even with grandmother's inheritance, she couldn't traipse about London on her own.

Just over a fortnight later, all her problems were resolved when a letter from Lady Nora Bloomfield, her aunt, arrived.

The letter was so charming that Sophia was sure she had finally found a relation, besides her father, of course, whom she could love. Aunt Nora—as she wanted her dear Sophia to call her—offered to chaperone Sophia through her first London Season. It was exactly what Sophia was hoping for! This wasn't just helpful; it was an absolute necessity. The only thing that could have been better would be leaving for London right then. But Sophia would have to wait eight months because that was the time that her aunt specified for her to arrive—at the beginning of the Season.

Despite having to wait so long, Sophia bombarded her father with her enthusiasm. "Isn't it exciting news? And perfect timing too, for I was just

beginning to despair of ever setting foot in London! Father, aren't you delighted for me?"

And, of course, her father said that, yes, he was delighted for her.

Later, as Sophia thought the matter over, she realized that the timing of her aunt's letter was too much of a coincidence. Father must have written to Aunt Nora and asked her to sponsor Sophia through the Season. What a difficult task that must have been. To contact her mother's family for the first time in more than fifteen years! The last time he had tried to contact them had been at her mother's death. No response had come. Sophia didn't know her father's feelings on this. He had told her of that first letter as a fact, very unemotionally, and only because she had been curious and had asked so many questions. But Sophia could just imagine how awful it must have been to be so insulted when he was still fresh in his grief.

And now, even all these years later, to write to Lady Bloomfield for a favor must have been a very unwelcome task for her father. Sophia had been joyful over something that must have caused her father pain. She resolved not to think so selfishly in the future. She had made similar resolutions before, but this time she was determined to succeed.

So she kept her enthusiasm in check around her father and told him how grateful she was for asking Aunt Nora for her help. He never did admit to doing so, but Sophia knew she was correct. She wrote an eager reply accepting her aunt's offer. All that was left to do was to be as patient as she could through the next eight months.

You've Just Finished your Free Sample

Enjoyed the preview?

Buy: <http://www.ebooks2go.com>