



Snowy Night with a Stranger (Scandalous)

By Jane Feather, Sabrina Jeffries, Julia London

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Warm up on a winter's night with three passionate love stories from three shining *New York Times* bestselling authors!

Jane Feather

leads an unwitting Yuletide traveler down a twisting path....

Edward Vasey, Viscount Allenton, is journeying precariously through a snowstorm when his coach is overtaken by high-waymen! Robbed of his money, Ned takes refuge at Selby Hall, where a spirited beauty with a shocking secret may steal something more -- his heart.

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sends a debutante into the wintry Scottish wilds....

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Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Three bestselling Regency romance authors dish up a holiday feast of jewel-tone ball gowns and smoldering glances. Feather (*To Wed a Wicked Prince*) introduces Lady Georgiana Carey and Ned Vasey, aka Viscount Allenton, in *A Holiday Gamble*, where they must circumvent their respective betrothals to consummate their attraction. In *Snowy Night with a Highlander*, London (*The Book of Scandal*) sends a masked stranger to help unescorted heiress Lady Fiona Haines travel a deserted road through Scotland's infamous Highlands. In the best of the three, *When Sparks Fly*, Jeffries (*Let Sleeping Rogues Lie*) strands holiday traveler Elinor Bancroft with her aunt and cousins at the home of the despicable Black Baron, Martin Thorncliff. While the endings are no surprise, there's plenty of romance and charm to enjoy along the way. (Nov.)

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About the Author

Jane Feather

Jane Feather is the *New York Times* bestselling author of more than thirty sensual historical romances, including the Blackwater Bride series. She was born in Cairo, Egypt, and grew up in the south of England. She currently lives in Washington, DC, with her family. There are more than 10 million copies of her books in print.

Sabrina Jeffries

Sabrina Jeffries is the *New York Times* and *USA TODAY* bestselling author of several Regency-set historical romance series, including the Royal Brotherhood, the School for Heiresses, the Hellions of Halstead Hall, the Duke's Men, and the Sinful Suitors. Whatever time is not spent writing in a coffee-fueled haze is spent traveling with her husband and adult autistic son or indulging in one of her passions: jigsaw puzzles, chocolate, music, and costume parties. With more than eight million books in print in twenty languages, the North Carolina author never regrets tossing a budding career in academics for the sheer joy of writing fun fiction and hopes that one day a book of hers will end up saving the world. She always dreams big.

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Chapter One

It seemed to have been snowing forever, Ned Vasey reflected glumly. His breath in the closed carriage had misted over the glass at the window, and he leaned forward and rubbed at the pane with his gloved hand. It cleared the mist but the outside was thickly coated with snow, offering only an opaque square of whiteness that gave little light and no visibility.

He sat back against the thick leather squabs and sighed. The carriage was in the first style of elegance and comfort, as well sprung as such a vehicle could ever be, but after close to three weeks' traveling, Viscount Allenton found it as comfortable as a donkey cart. The snow had started in earnest as they'd left Newcastle, but now that they were lumbering through the lower reaches of the Cheviot Hills it was a blizzard. The horses were struggling to keep their footing on the sometimes steep road that for long stretches was barely a

cart track winding its way through the foothills. God knows what it would be like higher up, Ned thought. The upper passes would certainly be blocked. But fortunately he was heading out of the hills, not into them.

Alnwick, a small, pretty Northumberland town. That was how he remembered it, but the last time he had visited his childhood home had been ten years ago, before he'd been packed off, the family's so-called black sheep, into exile over a scandal that struck him now as utterly stupid. Since then his blood had thinned under the Indian sun, and he couldn't seem to get warm anywhere in this godforsaken frozen north.

And if his brother, Robert, had managed to keep himself alive, Ned would still be warmly content in India's sultry heat. But Rob, as so often in their childhood, had ridden his horse blindly at a hedge during a hunt, and both horse and rider had gone down into the unseen ditch on the other side. The horse had broken both forelegs, and Rob his neck. Which left the previously contented younger son, Edward the black sheep, to inherit the family estates and the title. And the younger son infinitely preferred the life of plain Ned Vasey, Indian nabob, to that of Edward Vasey, Viscount Allenton.

But such is fate, Ned reflected, huddling closer into his greatcoat. Ten years ago the estate had been going to rack and ruin under his father's reckless negligence, and it seemed from the agent's letters that Rob had finished the job. Which left the younger son, who had somehow managed to turn his exile into a very good thing, to pick up the pieces. And a very expensive picking up it was going to be, Ned had no doubt.

The carriage shuddered as the horses stumbled on the deeply rutted and now slippery track. Stopping was not an option. They would all freeze to death, coachman, postillions, horses and all.

The carriage was still moving, but very slowly. Ned opened the door with difficulty against the crust of snow and ice, and stepped out into the blizzard. He struggled toward the coachman and the near-side postillion. "How much farther before we're out of here?" he called up, snow filling his mouth and blocking his nose.

"Hard to say, m'lord," the coachman called down, flicking his whip at the striving horses. "At this speed, it could take an hour to do a mile."

Ned swore into a gust of snow, his words snatched by the wind.

"Best get back in, sir," the coachman shouted down. "Your weight don't make no difference to the 'osses, and ye've no need to freeze yet a while."

Ned nodded and climbed back into the coach, still swearing as he realized he'd allowed himself to get frozen to the bone with no way of warming himself up again in the frigid interior.

If he ever made it to Hartley House, at least he'd find a warm welcome there. And a house bursting with Christmas revelry. Lord Hartley's bluff camaraderie and generous spirit would be a welcome antidote to what was bound to be the dank neglect of his own house. Sarah would make him a good wife....

"Whoa...whoa, there."

The coachman's yell broke into Ned's thoughts and he reached for the door handle again as the carriage juddered to a halt. He pushed open the door and jumped down. A torch flickered just ahead on the track showing four figures, barely visible in the swirling snow, milling around an overturned gig. The pony had been released from the traces and stood blowing steam through its nostrils and stamping its hooves.

"Stay with the horses," Ned instructed over his shoulder. He plowed through the snow toward the scene. "What happened here?"

A youth turned from the group. "Pony caught a hoof in a rut, sir," he said in a broad Northumberland accent that Ned hadn't heard in ten years. To his satisfaction, however, he found that he could still understand it without difficulty. For strangers to the county, it might as well have been a foreign tongue.

Ned bent to check the pony's legs, running his hand expertly over the hocks. "I can find no damage," he said, straightening. "Why would you bring a pony out with a gig on a night like this?"

"Why would ye bring them 'osses out in a bleedin' blizzard?" the youth demanded on a clearly combative note.

Despite the snow, there had been no signs of a storm when they'd left that morning, but Ned was not about to bandy words with this insolent young man. He turned away, back to his own conveyance.

The blow to the back of his neck surprised him more than it hurt him. He stumbled to his knees in the snow and something -- no, someone -- jumped lightly onto his back, legs curling around his waist as he knelt. Hands slipped into the deep pockets of his coat, and then fingers slid inside his coat. It was all over in the blink of an eye. The slight weight left his back, and as he struggled to his feet, his assailants and the pony disappeared into the blanket of snow behind him. The gig remained where it was. Presumably it was a permanent fixture, designed to catch any unwary traveler on these seldom-used tracks.

Ned cursed his own stupidity. He knew that the Cheviots were plagued by bands of rascals and highwaymen; he simply hadn't expected to fall victim on such a filthy night. He dug into his pockets. He had kept a pouch with five guineas close to hand for easy distribution at roadside inns. It was gone.

"What 'appened there, m'lord? Couldn't see a thing in this." The coachman had climbed down from his box, but neither he nor the postillions had left the horses.

"Nothing much," Ned said, climbing back into the carriage, now as wet as he was cold. "Keep going."

The carriage lurched forward again and he felt inside his coat. His fob watch was gone from his waistcoat pocket. Those light fingers had demonstrated all the sleight of hand of an experienced pickpocket. He hadn't been able to see the features of any of his cloaked and hooded assailants behind the veil of snow, but he was fairly certain he would recognize the feel of those fingers against his heart.

The financial loss was no great matter, but the blow to his pride was another thing altogether. Ten years ago he wouldn't have fallen for such a trick, but his sojourn in India had clearly softened him, he thought disgustedly. He had learned how to make money, a great deal of money, but he'd lost something in the process. Something he had to retrieve if he was to assume the life of a North Country English gentleman once again.

God, he was cold. He could only begin to imagine what those poor buggers outside were feeling.

Something hammered on the roof. The coachman. He struggled with the frozen door again and leaned out. "What is it?" His words disappeared into the snow but the coachman, just visible on the box above him, pointed with his whip. Ned stared into the whiteness, then saw it -- a glimmer of light, flickering like a will-o'-the-wisp in the distance.

"We can't go no farther, m'lord," the coachman bellowed. "The 'osses won't make it, an' me blood's freezin'. Reckon we 'ave to try an' rouse someone."

"Agreed," Ned shouted. "I'll go ahead and see what's there. I can make better time on foot." He jumped down

into snow that reached his knees. "Postillions, release the horses from the traces and lead them after me."

The two men dismounted and stumbled through the snow to the horses' heads. Ned plunged forward, still up to his knees, keeping the flickering light in his sights. And after fifteen agonizingly slow minutes the lights grew steady and close. He could hear the wheezing of the postillions behind him and the puffing of the beasts, but salvation lay just ahead.

A long driveway led up to a large stone mansion, lights pouring forth from many windows, piercing the veil of snow. The strains of music could be heard faintly as the travelers approached the flight of steps leading up to double front doors. Ned drew his greatcoat tight and dug his way up the steps to the door. He banged the big brass knocker in the shape of a gryphon's head. And he banged it again, ever conscious of his freezing horses, and the desperation of the coachman and postillions, all standing in the snow at the foot of the steps.

He heard footsteps, the wrenching of bolts, and the door opened slowly. Light and warmth poured forth. A liveried butler stood in the doorway, gazing in something approaching disbelief at this visitor. "Can I help you, sir?"

For a moment Ned was tempted to laugh at the absurdity of the question. But only for a moment. "Yes," he said curtly. "I am Viscount Allenton, on my way to Alnwick. My men and I are benighted in this blizzard, and we need shelter. I'd be grateful if you'd bring me to your master, but first send someone to direct my coachman and postillions to the stables, and then to the kitchen fire." He stepped past the man into the hall as he spoke.

"Yes...yes, of course, my lord." The butler called over his shoulder and a footman appeared. "Ensure Lord Allenton's horses are fed and watered and bedded for the night, and show his servants to the kitchen. They will be glad of supper and ale." He turned back to Ned. "May I take your greatcoat, my lord?"

Ned became aware of the growing pudd...

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Ethel Fung:

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