



Gina Rose

*My Sweet
Alyssa*

Brothers In All: Book 1

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Book 1 From the Brothers In All Series

By

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My Sweet Alyssa

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Paperback

ISBN-13: 978-0-9960940-6-1, ISBN-10: 099609406

Ebook ISBN-13: 978-0-9960940-7-8,

ISBN-10: 0996094075

Paperback ISBN-13: 978-1500350864,

ISBN-10: 1500350869

BISAC Codes:

FIC027000 FICTION / Romance / General

FIC027070 FICTION / Romance / Historical / Regency

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League City, Texas, United States of America

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Prologue

1806

Northumberland, England

“Alyssa, you have visitors awaiting you in the drawing room,” Mrs. Hopkins, her governess said as she entered the room.

She looked up in surprise. “Who would be visiting me?”

She was a bit annoyed that her free time had been interrupted. She was reading her new Gothic horror novel and had just reached a very scary part.

“Your Uncle Morley and his daughter Diana have come to call, all the way from London. They said it was a matter of utmost importance. They ask that you attend them right away as they are pressed for time,” she told her rather sternly.

Alyssa didn’t like the sound of that. She hadn’t seen her uncle in eight years since she was five years old. What could he want with her? She simply couldn’t imagine what he would have to discuss with her, important or otherwise.

“I shall see them right now, Mrs. Hopkins. Thank you,” she said, putting aside her novel.

She hurried downstairs to the drawing room. Upon entry she saw her uncle, along with her cousin, sitting impatiently on the sofa. She couldn’t help but observe her cousin must be nearing marriageable age. That was somewhat surprising. She expected the young girl from her memory. Her uncle still looked like the same grumpy person he always was. He scowled at the door while awaiting

her.

“Hello, Uncle Morley, Diana. It’s so good to see you both,” she greeted them, sweeping into the room.

“Sit down child. We have much to discuss,” her uncle said, ignoring her greeting and sparing none for her in return.

She did as she was instructed, quickly sitting on the sofa opposite them. She folded her hands in her lap and sat primly as she had been taught to do by Mrs. Hopkins, then nodded for him to begin.

She noticed that her Uncle Morley Habersham, Earl of Glenmont, looked particularly sour this day. This caused a real sense of foreboding to rest in her belly. She stiffened her spine in an attempt to control the shivers and waited for him to commence.

“I’m afraid we are not here for a social visit, child. We have come to collect you to bring you back to London. It was your father’s will that you should be entrusted into my keeping upon his death. His ship was lost at sea during a violent gale, you see. There were no survivors. Therefore, I am now your legal guardian until you reach the age of five and twenty,” he said, without even a hint of sympathy.

She sat in stunned silence, trying to absorb his unbelievable words. She couldn’t make them mesh with the scene in front of her. She looked upon the faces of her relatives, noting her uncle appeared to be irritated ... as if he were being put upon. Her cousin appeared to be rather smug, as if she were privately laughing about some joke that only she

were privy to.

She blinked her eyes and shook her head, trying to make sense of what she was seeing and hearing. How could they be sitting here in front of her, acting as though it were an everyday occurrence to deliver such horrific news without so much as a hint of remorse? Father dead? What was this madness? She sat disbelieving, continuing to note the absurdity of their demeanor. Truly alarmed now, her throat began to constrict as her pulse thundered through her head making her feel dizzy, as though she would swoon.

“This simply can’t be true,” she croaked out, as the room started to spin. She tried to stand to escape their presence but when she did, she toppled over, falling into the void of darkness.

“Look Papa. The silly chit fainted,” Diana pealed as she gawked at her cousin, who lay heaped on the floor.

“Go tell the butler to have her things packed and ready within the hour,” the earl instructed, with annoyance at his daughter’s calloused comment.

Chapter One

1811

Mayfair, London

Alyssa turned eight and ten today. Though you would never know it, as nary a word was mentioned by anyone. As usual, there were no celebrations or gifts in observance of the day. It was just a day like any other, except she was no longer seven and ten. She had been instructed to prepare a room for the arrival of Alistair Sinclair, the Earl of Keith, who was the stepson of her Uncle Morley.

It was made known to her that Alistair was returning from Jamaica, where he made his fortune from a tea plantation that he had purchased six years before. His fortune secure, he had decided he should take a wife. This decision brought him to London for the season to look over this year's crop of debutantes. She didn't care why he was coming, only that he would be one more responsibility for her to oversee. His lordship would only add work to her constantly growing list of daily chores. She was already worked near exhaustion as it was.

Today put her one small step closer to the age when she could escape this life of drudgery she had come to know in the so-called care of her uncle. In his care, she was reduced to a servant in the household, treated quite cruelly by her relatives.

Her uncle and his wife Esmeralda, along with her cousin Diana, took pains to remind her daily of the imposition they had been made to suffer by providing her with their so-called protection. She

scoffed at the notion. She wasn't sure what they meant by imposition, considering that they gained a free servant in the bargain.

She wasn't allowed to mix with the family or attend any parties or social functions that they so often engaged in. She suspected her guardians didn't want it known to the local bachelor population that she was a potential bride with a very sizeable fortune. That would be too much competition for her cousin, Diana. Esmeralda simply couldn't allow that. No, instead she was housed in the servant's quarters, a small room in the attic with only a cot, a small table and stool for her comfort.

It was a sad plight for an heiress of some considerable fortune to have to endure. Sadly, she was still three years away from being able to receive a monthly pension from her fortune. She hoped that when she did, she could leave this cursed place, though she didn't think her uncle would allow it. He would still be her guardian for another four years beyond that. Of course, she wouldn't be able to obtain her entire fortune before the age of five and twenty unless she married, which would give her husband control of her money ... if she found a husband ...

Even that was an unlikely possibility for her, with her uncle refusing to allow her to have a season where she could meet potential candidates. She suspected he rather enjoyed controlling her fortune and that he wanted to keep her from marrying until the last possible moment before being forced, by law to relinquish his custodial rights to her inheritance. She also suspected that by

the designated age, she wouldn't have much left. Since her arrival, the family had been living in highly improved circumstances, all with the exception of her, of course. Alyssa didn't dare dream too often about escaping her reality. It was better just to quietly cooperate, making as little trouble as possible to get through it as best she could. Aunt Esmeralda was always quick to squash any attempts she ever made to improve her situation. The punishments were always harsh.

A few months ago, Esmeralda caught her thumbing through a book in the library. The consequences were quite merciless. She had been forced to go without food for three days. If it hadn't been for Cookie, smuggling small meals to her every day, the suffering would surely have been unbearable. Had Cookie been discovered, there's no telling what Esmeralda would have done to her, so Alyssa decided that it would be better to live as a servant should until which time she was old enough to escape her situation legally.

Cookie was the only real ally she had in the household. She told Alyssa on more than one occasion that if she ever wanted to escape her plight, she could help her. But she had to be truly desperate. The price for doing so would be costly. Alyssa told her she didn't have access to her money and couldn't pay any price, but Cookie assured her money wouldn't be a problem. That was confusing to Alyssa so she didn't dwell on the puzzling statement much. It would be better to tough it out here where she could keep an eye on her relatives as they spent her fortune. One day though, she would

make them pay for what they had done to her. One day ... she sighed deeply and finished putting the bed together. There was simply no sense in dreaming when she had so much work to do.

Alyssa continued preparing the room not realizing she was being observed. She was in the water closet now, down on her hands and knees scrubbing the inside of the copper tub when she heard a soft whistle behind her. She jerked her head up, instantly making eye contact with a very handsome man standing in the doorway admiring the view of her backside. Flustered from being taken unawares, she quickly stood up, faced the man, and blushed with embarrassment at being caught in such an unladylike position. Her curly auburn hair had fallen away from its bun in her struggles with the tub, causing her lace cap to become askew, leaving strands of her unruly hair hanging about her face, covering her eyes. She tried to blow at the offending strands only to have them fall right back into her eyes. She went to move them with her gloved hands but only managed to smear her face with suds, furthering her overall embarrassment. Alyssa was sure she must have made quite a comical sight.

“Don’t let me interrupt you lass, please continue,” the handsome man armed with a devilish grin said in a mild, Scottish brogue.

The tall, broad shouldered man was adorned with black hair cut in the popular Brutus fashion, which served to accentuate his intense black eyes. He had a strong jawline adorned with heavy sideburns, and a dimple in his chin that drew the eye to

his wide-set mouth. The man's skin was bronzed, obviously from prolonged exposure to the sun, giving him a virile look. Alyssa calculated he must be close to thirty years old as his eyes were starting to show signs of age, with squint lines in the corners.

He stood there in his relaxed pose, leaning against the doorframe. He continued to look her over from head to toe, with an arched eyebrow and that same wicked smile. He was ruggedly handsome, in his state of half-dress, wearing only a white lawn shirt with the sleeves rolled up and his black breeches tucked in his Hessian boots. Alyssa was reminded of the pirates she had read about in her youth. He was the most handsome man she had ever seen, she decided. True, she hadn't seen many men outside of the household, but this one standing before her now had to be an exceptional representation of his gender.

It finally occurred to Alyssa that this must be Alistair. She quickly recovered her wits, "Forgive me my lord, I was just preparing your room and should only be another moment or two," she said, turning back to her task.

She became aware of movement behind her and was startled when he placed a hand on her shoulder to stop her from bending back down.

"What is your name, my lovely?" he asked in a husky voice.

Alyssa felt a warm sensation seep into her back, making her shiver in response. She swallowed hard, turning to face him.

"My name is Alyssa, my lord," was her timid

reply.

“Alyssa, ah ... a lovely name for a beautiful maid,” he said as his eyes devoured her.

His penetrating eyes bore into hers, causing her to become quite unsettled. She cast her eyes down, turned to go back to her chore, hoping he would leave so she could finish in peace. He was just too handsome that his being so near in such a small space was unnerving. She bent back over the tub, scrubbing again, but every fiber of her being was aware he remained behind her.

After a moment, she heard him turn to leave the water closet, allowing her to breathe a sigh of relief. When she was through with her task, she hurried to the mirror to tidy up her hair and return it to the confines of her cap. Once she had herself set back to rights, she picked up her cleaning supplies, taking leave of the water closet. Thinking she would be able to avoid the man, she quickly came to a halt when she spotted him standing with his back leaning against the closed bedroom door. Like a trapped animal, she stood frozen while he stared at her for what seemed like an eternity. She felt quite helpless to move. Finally, Alistair pushed himself away from the door. Slowly, ever so seductively advanced toward her. When he was standing directly in front of her, he raised his hand to her head. With a gleam in his eyes, he gently removed her cap as though he were unwrapping a gift. She tried to step back, but her attempt was feeble, allowing him to close the gap between them.

“Don’t be frightened lass, I only want to see how beautiful you are with your hair down,” he said

as his eyes held hers captive.

Alyssa was afraid to move, so she just stood there while he removed the pins from her hair, causing the unruly mass to fall on her shoulders and down her back. Alistair gasped his appreciation and stepped back to admire his handiwork.

“A woman such as you should not be scrubbing bathtubs,” was his conclusion.

Alyssa didn't respond to that. Instead, she cast her eyes down to the floor hoping he would quit toying with her so she could make her escape. It was embarrassing to have him gazing at her as if she were a prized cow. He startled her when he boldly took her by the chin to lift her face so he could look into her eyes. His captivating black eyes held her as he slowly leaned in to place a gentle kiss on her lips. Stunned by his audacity, she froze in place, afraid to make a move. She had never been in this situation before. It was daunting to say the least. She knew that he shouldn't be doing this, but more importantly, she knew she shouldn't allow it. Her mind reeled at all the trouble she could get in if she were to be caught, yet she was afraid that if she were to make an issue of it, things would go badly for her with Esmeralda, his mother, so she remained quiet.

“You taste like fresh honey,” he said, ending the kiss.

Alyssa was slightly trembling now, but she remained quietly in place. He continued with his perusal of her person for another moment or two before she worked up the courage to ask, “May I be excused now, my lord?”

“I could take you away from here and give you everything your heart desires,” was his response.

Alyssa didn't know what to make of this. What was he suggesting? She quickly got her answer when he took her silence as some kind of acquiesce, then took her in his arms causing her to drop her supplies. He dove forward, taking her lips in a searing kiss that quite stunned her. She felt his tongue probing between her lips, gasping in surprise at the intimacy allowing him to thrust it in slowly to mingle with her own. It was a strange sensation, though not entirely unpleasant. This man who dared to take such liberties with her smelled of brandy, bay rum soap mixed with sweat, causing his essence to overwhelm her as he continued with his domination of her mouth. Finally, she realized the precariousness of her situation and shoved away from him, breaking the kiss.

“My lord please, may I be excused,” she said trembling.

When he said nothing, she grabbed up her supplies and quickly made for the door. Just as she opened it, she heard him say, “I will have you, lass.”

She did not respond but rushed through the door and down the hall in escape.

Alistair was in love. There was simply no other way to look at it, but that he was entirely besotted with the maid. He laughed at himself while watching her scurry out of the room like a frightened little rabbit.

Could you have botched that up any worse old boy? Yes, he had botched it up; he frightened the poor lass half out of her wits. He sighed deeply while running his hand through his hair, shaking his head in recrimination for his own behavior, but truly he had never seen a lass as beautiful as she in all his life.

Her eyes were the color of the sea, beautiful blue-green that went on forever in their depths; a man could drown when gazing upon them. She was enchanting with her mane of rich auburn curls with streaks of fire that perfectly framed her delicate oval face, which was accented with a light dusting of freckles across her perky little nose. She was petite in stature but shapely in all the right places, with full breasts and perfectly rounded bottom. She was so small that he had felt like a giant next to her as the top of her head barely reached his shoulder.

Disappointment settled in as the realization struck him that the minx was a distraction he really didn't need right now. He was here for the purpose of finding a wife. He couldn't take on a mistress in the midst of that, lest he be considered a scoundrel. Oh, but she was so beautiful, he silently lamented. When she was bent over the tub, it was all he could do to ignore the invitation that her shapely bottom had offered as it wiggled back and forth as she struggled with her labor. His hands had ached to reach out to possess her then and there. It had been too long since he had lain with a woman, he decided, many weeks, in fact. That's all it was, surely. She was a tempting morsel that no man could ignore much less one who had been traveling

in a state of celibacy for weeks.

Perhaps there would be no real harm in partaking of her before he actively started his search for a wife. She was just a maid after all; it wasn't like he would set her up as he would a real mistress. He smiled as the notion began to take hold in his mind. He would get her out of his system with a few good romps then he could start his search with a fresh unpolluted view of the field. It wouldn't do to go out in search of a wife all wound up in sexual frustration ending up with a toad because he wasn't thinking clearly. She would be therapeutic, now that he thought on it.

Too bad, he wouldn't see anything to equal her among the debutantes of the ton. What a man wouldn't do to have a wife like that. Sadly, he could never offer a servant such as her, his proposal. His peers would ridicule him if he were to marry such a woman. But then again, he would be going back to Jamaica. No one would have to know ... he shook his head. Who was he kidding? The news would arrive there before he did. No, the best he could do was to have an affair with her for a week or two then be done with her. With that decided, he undressed and went to the water closet to prepare a bath. He would have her ... if only for a week or two.

Alistair sat at the dining table brooding about Alyssa. He hadn't seen her again since this morning upon his arrival. He was aching to get his hands on

her. His mother was chattering away like a magpie. His stepfather was grunting his responses while consuming his meal. His half-sister, Diana was humoring her mother with nods and smiles as she regaled them all with all the latest gossip of the ton.

A thought occurred to him as he sat there thinking about Alyssa. He could ask Diana to make arrangements to send the lass to him tonight. He could contrive a complaint about something lacking with the readiness of his sleeping quarters. Yes, that would work, he reasoned.

He straightened up in his chair trying to look lively as he finished his meal. He wanted to bring a quick end to it so he could speak with his sister in private. A quarter of an hour later, he was put out of his misery when everyone finished their meal, moving to the drawing room. Just before entering, he pulled Diana to the side.

“I need a favor, dear sister,” he said quietly.

Diana beamed at him, leaning in so she could hear his request. She was a very tall though somewhat slim, pretty young woman at the age of two and twenty, with black hair as a backdrop for her hazel eyes, which she had received from her mother. She had always adored her brother and would do anything for him, so she was eager to hear what he had to ask of her.

“Yes, Ali?” she encouraged.

“There is a maid here by the name of Alyssa. I want you to make arrangements to send her to my room tonight, I have need of her services before I retire,” he explained.

Diana’s reaction wasn’t what he would have

expected. She burst into laughter. “Oh dear brother, what on earth could you possibly want with her?” she asked incredulously.

“That is not your concern, Diana,” he said somewhat indignant. A gentleman didn’t discuss such things with his sister, after all.

“I’m afraid you will have to find another maid. She is off limits,” she told him.

“Off limits?” he asked.

“Yes, she is my cousin, you see, Papa’s ward.”

“You had better explain yourself,” he demanded.

“She is Uncle Hugh’s orphaned daughter, so of course Papa has taken charge of her until she reaches the age of five and twenty. She has been with us for the last five years since she was three and ten. She is an heiress you know, a vast fortune worth millions,” she told him with a hint of jealousy in her tone.

Alistair was speechless. He stood there gaping at his sister as if she were speaking a foreign language. Finally, he found his voice, “What in the name of all that is holy is she doing scrubbing bathtubs if she is an heiress and family, no less?”

“Don’t huff and puff at me brother, it’s none of my doing. Papa says she has to pay for the privilege of our protection. Papa says she needs discipline, that she is strong-willed and would never make a good wife with her disposition. He says she needs to be brought to heel. That can only be accomplished through hard work and strict discipline,” she explained with an air of utter disdain for her cousin.

Alistair couldn’t believe what he was hearing.

He continued to stare at his sister in utter disbelief before saying, “Are you pulling my tail?”

“No, I am not pulling your tail, I am quite serious. It’s true, all of it,” she said, offended by his accusation.

Alistair looked over at his stepfather, whom he now completely loathed. He was shocked he could treat the poor lass in such a barbaric manner. He suspected that there was more to this than met the eye, and he intended to get to the bottom of it. He walked away from his sister, entering the drawing room. The wheels in his mind were spinning. He felt somewhat uplifted, knowing that Alyssa was now within his reach. If what his sister said was true, he could offer marriage to her and become a very rich man in the offing. Not a bad prospect at all.

“Cookie?” she asked, “What do you know about the Earl of Keith?”

Alyssa had stayed hidden from view as best she could the rest of the day after her encounter with Alistair, but she couldn’t quite put him out of her mind. That kiss had been so shocking to her senses that it had ruled her thoughts constantly since it occurred. She went down to the kitchen as she always did at this time in the evening to partake of her meal with Cookie and the butler Mr. Humphrey. She thought to take the opportunity to do a little probing about the man who had taken such liberties with her this morning.

“You must mean her ladyship’s son. Well, I don’t rightly know much but that he’s been away for many years making his fortune in Jamaica on a plantation or some such; not sure exactly what kind. I know he was born in Scotland; seems a nice enough young man, though he must be close to thirty, if not already, I’d wager,” she explained.

Cookie was a rather nice looking middle-aged woman with brown hair dusted with gray and soulful brown eyes. She was fairly educated for one of her class as her father had been a scholar and had taught her to read and write. How she ended up as a cook was a complete mystery to everyone. She had never divulged that information. She was known to have traveled to France where she learned the culinary arts. She was so good at her profession she could work for the king if she were so inclined. Indeed, she was a bit of a mystery. She adored Alyssa and always looked after her as best she could. Cookie was the only real friend she had.

“Why do you ask, love,” she asked when Alyssa had remained quiet.

“Oh, no reason in particular,” she responded with a blush that she felt all the way to her toes.

“Ah, what’s this?” Cookie asked, taking in Alyssa’s rosy complexion.

Alyssa ducked her head and squirmed on her stool. She did not want to discuss her condition with Mr. Humphrey sitting right there. Cookie seemed to realize the problem and said, “Henry, could you take your supper to your room, so I can speak to the child?”

Mr. Humphrey got up, doing as he was bid.

When he was out of earshot, Cookie pressed, “Tell me child. Did the earl do something he shouldn’t have?”

Alyssa’s blush deepened if such a thing were possible making it hard to look at Cookie, who was scowling at her now.

“H-He kissed me,” she finally managed.

Cookie gasped. She reached out and took Alyssa’s hands in hers. “You mustn’t allow yourself to be alone with him again, do you hear me child?”

“He was very kind. He offered to take me away from here,” Alyssa defended him.

“Aye,” she said, “and to make you his mistress, no doubt,” Cookie said, shaking her head in disgust. “Although, becoming his mistress could be the answer to your problems, my love. It wouldn’t be so bad really. I’m sure he would treat you far better than you have been here,” she added.

It was Alyssa’s turn to gasp, “I could never allow such a thing. Why, I would never be able to marry if I did that, and I do plan to marry some day, you know,” she admonished.

“Don’t get yourself all riled up, dear. It was just a suggestion. Many a lady in your situation has done just that and worse to escape their plight,” Cookie said, then quickly looked away. Alyssa saw she was blushing herself.

“Cookie, is that what you did?” Alyssa asked before she thought about her question with its implications.

Cookie was silent for a moment then turned back to Alyssa. She simply said, “Aye.”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to pry.”

“It’s all right, love. My sister and I were forced to make tough decisions when our father died, leaving us in debt. Annabelle and I both found protectors, but when our beauty started to fade, we had to make another choice. Hers was to start a brothel. Mine was to become a chef, so here we are. I don’t regret any of it,” she explained.

Alyssa stared at her friend as if seeing her for the first time. She tried to imagine what she must have looked like as a young woman. She could clearly see she had been a beauty. It was a shame that fate dealt her the hand that it had. She could have gone on to find a husband and raise a family had her father not left her and her sister in debt. It was sad that women had so few choices in this world.

Alyssa took her friend’s hands in her own this time, saying, “I love you, Cookie, and I thank you for sharing your story with me. I will take what you said into consideration with the care that it was given. It’s true; he could probably offer me a better life than this, but oh, I would miss you so.”

The two friends sat in teary-eyed silence for a few moments before Cookie gave a magnificent smile, saying, “How about one of my peach tarts and some creme?”

“That would be grand,” Alyssa beamed at her in return.

Alyssa was tired by the time she crawled into her cot that night. Her mind was reeling with the day’s

events, but try as she might she couldn't put Cookie's words out of her head. Her words mingled with Alistair's kiss until she was quite beside herself with indecision. Could she really swallow her pride and self-respect to become Alistair's mistress? She didn't know. Her situation was bad, but it wasn't as desperate as Cookie's had been. There were no creditors threatening to send her to prison, though she was in a prison of sorts, there was no real threat to her overall well-being. True, Alistair was a very handsome man and very wealthy, too. He could set her up quite nicely for the next few years until she started receiving her monthly allowance. Why, they might even fall in love and get married, she thought with a shiver.

Well, first things first. He has to ask me to become his mistress then I shall make my decision. No point in working myself up when the question hasn't even been put to me. He merely suggested he could provide a better life for me. Nothing has been set in stone.

Yes, she would wait to see what tomorrow would bring, she decided, making a vain attempt to fluff up her hopelessly flat pillow. Once settled, she closed her eyes and tried to sleep.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

My father was a great story teller and always said that one day; he would like to write a novel. My sister is a writer as well, so naturally I'm a dabbler. I thought I'd try my hand at writing romance novels because I love to read them. Romance novels have everything you want; mysteries, villains; wonderful characters and I easily find myself living in the moment with the story. I hope that readers will find my stories as entertaining as I have found so many. I like to mix tragedy and comedy together with a cast of colorful characters that I create from people that I have met in my life. I will visualize a person that I know as this or that character and the rest is history.

I hope you enjoy my warped sense of humor and the stories that I tell. In addition to Keeping Chelsea's Secret, I am also the author the Brother's In All series which includes My Sweet Alyssa, Resurrecting Dylan; and Luther's Own.

Gina Rose is the pseudonym for a very prolific author who spins tales in the Regency Romance genre.

Look for many more of her books to be available soon on Amazon and most other online bookstores.

Check her website, ginarose-author.com, often for more information and reviews.

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