

*Rebecca's
Reveries*

by Marnie L. Pehrson

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To Laurel,

*for the laughs, the tears and years
ahead when you'll look back and realize
your mother wasn't as crazy as
you thought she was.*

Special Thanks to Amy

*for the brainstorming sessions,
constant encouragement and hysterical instant
messages. Couldn't have done it without you!*

Chapter 1

*R*ebecca Marchant slumped in the window seat of her bedroom, leaning her shoulder against the dormer window pane. While her dark brown eyes gazed intently on the bright summer day, she remained completely oblivious to the birds chirping outside her window, the crystal clear blue skies and the roses blooming in her mother's flower garden. A solitary tear streamed down her cheek and landed on her hands which were folded in front of her, resting on the window sill.

The days leading up to and including her mother's funeral were busy, people bustling about helping, bringing a plethora of food and condolences. The lonely weeks following were quiet. Her once jovial father remained sequestered in his study brooding, working constantly and mourning the loss of his life's love. He ate little, and slept even less. What sleep he did obtain was not in his bedroom, but on a couch in his study. Months had passed since her mother's death and the tear trailing down Rebecca's cheek at that moment was not for the loss of her mother, whom she loved and missed, but for the absence of her father's companionship.

Gone were the evenings they spent together riding horseback. Gone were the horse races and competitions, the

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steeplechases and cheering for the family's entry in the qualifying races of the Kentucky Derby. The Kentucky Derby would be held within the next few days and Rebecca lamented that it would be the first one she and her father had missed for as long as she could remember.

Rebecca, shook from her reverie by a horse drawn carriage pulling up into the circular driveway, rose to her feet and crossed to her mirror, brushing the tears from her eyes and straightening her sleek dark black hair. She hated to appear teary-eyed in front of her Aunt Miriam so she dabbed at the corner of her eyes with her handkerchief, pinched her high cheekbones, widened her deep brown eyes, and pasted on a smile in an effort to appear cheerful. Aunt Miriam wouldn't stand for "pity-wallowin'" as she put it. She loved her younger sister, Caroline, in a way no one else could, but she had had her fill of Ethan Marchant's constant brooding and inability to continue with his life. She worried for his health and grew more concerned with each passing day that sixteen-year-old Rebecca's youth wasted away. Miriam made two or three visits each week to the house to check on Rebecca, seeing that she was well cared for and attempting to fill the void caused by Caroline's passing.

Rebecca wore her cheerful smile down the steps and opened the door for her aunt, "Aunt Miriam! So wonderful to see you!" Rebecca threw her arms around her Aunt who returned her embrace. Miriam had a youthful glow about her. In her early forties, she had managed to escape the onset of wrinkles. She swept her beautiful blonde hair atop her head and wore a bright blue hat that matched her exceptional blue eyes. Miriam loved bright colors that matched her sunny

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disposition. Rebecca thought happily of her mother whenever Aunt Miriam was around. They both shared the same sunny character and had a way of making you laugh when you were experiencing your greatest pain.

“So good to see you dear!” she examined Rebecca and assessed that her niece had been crying, but decided not to mention it since Rebecca had at least tried to appear cheerful. “I assume your father is in his cave?” she stated with a disapproving look.

“I suppose so,” Rebecca shrugged her shoulders.

“I thought I’d take you shopping today, dear! It looks like you could use a new dress for the Derby,” Aunt Miriam winked.

“Shopping! Oh, how wonderful! I’d love to get out and go shopping!” Rebecca’s eyes twinkled in anticipation. “But I don’t think we’re going to the Derby this year.” Her countenance fell slightly.

“Well, we’ll see,” Miriam winked. “You run along and get ready to go while I speak with your father for a moment,” Miriam nodded toward the stairs.

Rebecca trotted up the staircase and Miriam knocked lightly on the large oak door to Ethan’s study. “Ethan, may I come in?” Miriam asked.

“Come,” Ethan muttered from the other side. Miriam opened the door wide and strode boldly into the room, a wave of pipe smoke wafted toward her as she entered. Ethan sat behind his desk scribbling on a stack of papers, holding his pipe clenched between his teeth, balancing it lightly with his left hand. He continued writing, barely acknowledging that she had entered the room.

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"Hello Ethan! I see you're working hard as usual," she exuded cheerfully.

"Uh hmm," he mumbled without looking up at her.

"Please take a break from that for a few moments and let's talk," she suggested.

Ethan pulled his pipe from his mouth. "I've got a lot to do today, Miriam. I haven't time for one of your lectures," Ethan's voice grew stronger and more authoritative as he glanced up at her and then back to his documents.

Miriam reached over and grabbed the stack of papers and held them in one hand at her side, "The paperwork can wait a minute and I *never* lecture, my dear brother-in-law!"

"Then what do you call it?" he looked up at her expectantly as he held out his hand for her to return his stack of papers.

"I call it conversation - you remember conversation don't you, Ethan? It's that thing people do when they open their mouths, sounds come out and words and messages are conveyed, thoughts shared, and feelings discussed."

He had to admit that her smile and demeanor were enchanting. She reminded him so much of Caroline that he felt that familiar stab in his heart and he suddenly lashed out.

"Miriam, just give me the papers. I have work to do. I don't have time for idle chit chat. Why don't you run along home and hound your own husband?"

"You don't have time for this paperwork, Ethan. Life's too short to spend it holed up in your study working, brooding and letting life pass you by."

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“Why not? What’s so great about life anyway?” he muttered.

“Why that young girl upstairs! That’s what’s great about life! Have you gone totally blind?”

He suddenly hung his head, “I – I just don’t have it in me anymore, Miriam.” He rubbed his temples.

“Rebecca needs a father now more than ever! She’s approaching marriageable age and she needs guidance and direction from her father!”

“Rebecca’s a good girl. She’s got a good head on her shoulders. She’s pretty and smart and has a strong faith. She’s had enough guidance growin’ up to know right from wrong, and she’s doin’ just fine without me meddlin’ in her life.”

“Rebecca *is* a good girl. She’s all those things you say, but she has no idea about the real world or temptation or the things that a young woman has to deal with at marriageable age. She needs guidance from her father to help her understand what men are like...what men expect.”

“If you’re talkin’ about the whole birds and the bees conversation, her mother had that with her when she turned sixteen, and she’s watched enough foals born to know the process,” he chuckled at Miriam, ran his fingers through his thick brown hair and leaned back in his chair.

“You know very well what I’m talkin’ about, Ethan Marchant! She needs to know about the world, about life. You and Caroline have sheltered her. She’s never even been around young men or in social situations. She needs to be introduced to society.”

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"Introduced to society? What are you drivin' at, Miriam?"

"Rebecca turns seventeen next month and I think she should be given a birthday party with young people as guests so she can be formally introduced to society," Miriam explained.

"Introduced to society – eh? You mean thrown to the wolves!" Ethan stood up. "Caroline and I decided long ago that we wouldn't expose Rebecca to all of that nonsense. We taught her how to work hard, to be self-sufficient, to ride horses, to work on the farm. This nonsense about suitors and bein' launched on society is frivolous and archaic. It's the kind o' thing that makes women into nothin' more than property – objects of men's improper intentions and leads to ... well, it leads to no good!"

"Ethan! You can't hide her off in this house and expect Prince Charming to come out of the blue and land on the front porch. You're wasting her prime years. Don't you want her to marry or have children? Don't you want grandchildren, Ethan?" Miriam continued.

"Of course, I want grandchildren. I just think the methods of society are demeaning to women. Women are not objects."

"I agree with you Ethan. Really I totally agree with you. And I'm not saying to throw Rebecca to the wolves. But couldn't we hand-select some young people and invite them to even a small party for Rebecca's seventeenth birthday? What harm is there in that?"

"And who would do the hand-selectin'?" he rubbed his thick brown beard.

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“I think we should listen to Rebecca’s suggestions about who she would like to invite and we can review the list together.”

“All right... but nothin’ outlandish,” he sat back down and motioned for her to leave the room.

“You’ve got to be a part of this Ethan. You can’t hide off in here in your cave and make me do all the work. You need to be involved in Rebecca’s life again. It’s time to stop your pity-wallowin’ and get out and live again.”

“Now don’t start on me! It’s bad enough that you’re meddlin’ in Rebecca’s life. Don’t be hornin’ in on mine.”

“I’m not hornin’ in on your life. But you need to start doin’ things with Rebecca again. She’s lonely! Can’t you see that? For starters, take her to the Kentucky Derby. Take her to the steeplechases. She loves that and misses doing those things with you. Take her for horseback rides at sunset like you used to. Wake up and see the beautiful daughter you have before some young man comes along and takes her away to his own house.”

“And I’ll have you to thank for that when he does!” Ethan felt that Miriam contradicted herself. One minute she’s pushing to socialize Rebecca so she can find a mate and the next she’s telling him to spend time with her before someone comes and takes her away.

“Ethan, Rebecca’s growin’ up. Marriage is inevitable. I’m just tryin’ to help her select a suitable companion and I’m tryin’ to keep you from wastin’ these few precious years you have with her. Can’t you wake up and see it?”

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"All right, All right, Miriam. Plan the party with Rebecca and I'll try to make myself more available to her." He held out his hand, "Now please give me back my papers."

"Will you take her to the Derby?" Miriam asked.

"Yes, yes, I'll take her to the Derby," he relented.

Miriam plopped the papers on the desk, "Fair enough. But I'm holdin' you to your word."

"Yes, Ma'am" he saluted.

She rolled her eyes, left the room and then a victor's smile spread across her rosy red lips.



Rebecca and Miriam stepped into Mrs. Winesett's dress shop.

"Good mornin', ladies!" the heavy set, middle-aged woman greeted enthusiastically.

"Good mornin', Mrs. Winesett!" Miriam nodded.

"How can I help you ladies?"

"We need a suitable dress and hat for Rebecca to wear to the Derby," Miriam began weaving through the store looking at the dresses.

"Oh, the Derby! I have just the dress!" Mrs. Winesett crossed to the back wall and retrieved a stunning green dress and hat. "I think this one would look lovely with Miss Rebecca's beautiful black hair and dark eyes."

Miriam smiled at Rebecca who nodded in approval.

"You know where the dressing room is, don't you, dear?" Mrs. Winesett handed the dress to Rebecca and pointed.

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Rebecca took the dress and changed into it. As she stepped out of the dressing room for Miriam to see her, Miriam gasped, "Oh, you look gorgeous in that, Rebecca! You'll be turnin' every young man's head at the Derby for sure!"

"And some older one's as well!" Mrs. Winesett nodded.

Rebecca blushed. Turning men's heads wasn't something she aspired to accomplish. Her mother and father taught her to be proper and respectable and the idea of flaunting herself at a man or adorning herself to capture men's attention seemed shameful.

"Perhaps I need something less... flamboyant?" Rebecca suggested.

"Afraid to turn men's heads, Miss Rebecca?" Mrs. Winesett accurately deduced with a wink.

"I just think it's improper to call such attention to oneself... It's simply immodest..."

"Immodest? Why there's not a thing immodest about that dress, Rebecca! It has a modest neckline and long sleeves. It's completely proper!" Aunt Miriam defended.

"No, I'm not talkin' about the dress being immodest, Aunt Miriam," Rebecca spoke softly. "I just feel it's immodest to wear something with the intention of luring a man's attentions."

"Good grief, Miss Rebecca!" Mrs. Winesett flung her small hand to her bosom. "How do you think we all got a man to marry us if we didn't lure his attentions in some way or 'nother!" She chuckled and Miriam joined in her mirth.

About that time, the bell chimed on the dress shop door as Annette Silverton entered the store with her mother.

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"You two talk it over and I'll go help these ladies," Mrs. Winesett suggested, still chuckling to herself as she went to the front of the store to help Annette and her mother.

"Annette needs a new party dress," Mrs. Silverton explained and Mrs. Winesett set about busily searching for the perfect dress for the curly blond-headed, fair complexioned, petite Annette. Rebecca watched them from across the room, trying not to appear obvious in her observations. She'd grown up with Annette. They attended school together. While she had always been friendly and courteous to Rebecca, Rebecca perceived Annette as a complete flirt. Seems as if she always had one young man or another wrapped around her little finger, and to Rebecca baiting men with audacious attire or flirtation bordered on sinful.

"I like the dress, Rebecca. I say we buy it!" Aunt Miriam announced.

"You don't think it's too... too..."

"Alluring?" Aunt Miriam finished for her.

"Well, yes?"

"Rebecca, dear, you're so pretty we could put you in a feed sack and men would still find you alluring!" Aunt Miriam laughed.

"Please, Aunt Miriam!" Rebecca's eyes darted around the store hoping that no one heard her Aunt's remark.

"So have you two ladies decided? Will this be the dress for the Derby?" Mrs. Winesett returned to where they stood.

"Yes, we'll take it," Miriam smiled decisively.

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Rebecca descended the stairs in her new green dress and tapped on her father's study door, "Papa are you ready to go?"

Ethan, who had been staring blankly out his study window answered, "Oh, is it time already?"

Rebecca opened the door and stepped into the room, "Yes, it's that time."

Ethan leaned back in his chair and a broad smile broke across his face, "Well, well, Rebecca! Your Aunt Miriam is right. I better start spendin' more time with you before some young man comes along and steals you away!"

"Oh Papa, you're such a tease!" Rebecca rolled her eyes.

Ethan rose from behind his desk and approached her, extending his arm, "I'm not teasin', Rebecca. I'll be surprised if by the time the Derby's over, you don't have some fella askin' me for courtin' privileges."

Rebecca blushed and took her father's arm, "Like I said, you are a merciless tease, Papa."

When they reached the Derby, heads did turn in Rebecca's direction, but she remained oblivious to them. She was too excited to step into the familiar sights, sounds and smells of the race track. Rebecca lived and breathed horses and to spend a day at the Kentucky Derby with her father at her side was to spend a day in heaven.

They stopped by the stable to see Midnight Silhouette, their entry in the Derby. The horse was a beautiful black stallion with a white patch on his nose. Rebecca gently stroked his neck, "You're gonna win for us today, aren't you

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boy?" Ethan took a moment to speak with the jockey who then climbed atop the horse and started off for the track. Ethan and Rebecca took their seats and waited for the race to start.

Midnight Silhouette got off to a good start and remained neck-and-neck with another horse named Indian Summer throughout the race. Rebecca and Ethan rose to their feet cheering as the horses took their last lap around the track. Rebecca glanced over at her father and chuckled. She was so happy to see him back to his old self as he cheered and clapped excitedly. Even when Indian Summer beat Midnight Silhouette by a nose, she still couldn't keep from smiling as her father pounded his fist into his hand.

"Ah, we almost had 'im! So close!" He took Rebecca by the shoulders and hugged her, "But second place isn't bad, is it? That's the best we've done since Day Star won in '78!" Rebecca and Ethan excitedly made their way over to the horses to congratulate the winner.

"That's quite a horse you have there, Dave," Ethan congratulated Indian Summer's owner, David Phillips.

"And you as well! Ol' Midnight gave our boy a run for the money!"

Rebecca patted Midnight's neck and spoke with the jockey until it was time to present the trophies.

On their way home, Rebecca and her father chatted as if it were old times. It was the first time Rebecca had seen her father relax and be his usual jovial self since her mother's death from the flu eight months prior. She hoped that he was finally snapping out of the haze that had shadowed his spirit.

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"Your Aunt Miriam tells me that you two are plannin' a birthday party for next month. Have you decided who you'll be invitin'?"

"Yes, we're inviting about ten people," she nodded.

"Thank you for agreeing to it, Papa!"

"Well, thank your Aunt Miriam. She gave me quite a lecture about you needin' to socialize more with young people your own age," he smiled over at her as he held the reins to the team loosely in his hands. "So how many young men and women are you invitin'?"

"Well, it's even - five young men and five young women," she answered.

"Then it's not even, Rebecca. You need another young man," he winked.

"What do you mean?"

"You're forgettin' yourself. You need another young man so that every young man has a young woman," he suggested, his eyes twinkling at his daughter.

"Hmmm.. I don't know who else to invite," she shrugged her shoulders.

"Here, this young man would love an invitation, I'd suspect," he handed her a slip of paper with a man's name and address written on it.

"Who's this?" her eyes expressed her puzzlement.

"That's Dave Phillips' son. He saw you at the winner's circle and asked me if he might come to call on you."

"Oh," Rebecca fumbled nervously with the piece of paper. Her mind searched trying to remember who he was and what he looked like.

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"I told you, someone would be askin' me for courtin' privileges before the day was out," he winked.

"I don't even recall a young man at the winner's circle," Rebecca's eyebrows furrowed as she tried to remember.

"Well, he's a few years older than you. He's in his mid-twenties I'd say," Ethan explained.

"Oh, *him*?" Rebecca remembered seeing a man in his twenties standing by Dave Phillips. He was a tall, trim fellow with auburn hair and deep blue eyes. "I suppose we could send him an invitation."

"I take it you weren't too impressed with him?"

"I don't know enough about him to be impressed," she answered truthfully.

Ethan chuckled, "I told Aunt Miriam you were a level headed girl!" He jiggled the reins and the horses increased their gait to a trot.



Something snapped in Ethan on Derby Day. It was as if being planted in the pleasant environment of horse races and jockeys with Rebecca as his companion woke him from a deep slumber and he remembered that there were still things in his life to love. From that day forward, life went back to the way it had been before Caroline's death – or as near as it could be without Caroline's brilliant personality to illuminate the house. Rebecca and Ethan enjoyed their horseback rides at sunset each evening and Ethan began breaking horses and working on the farm again instead of leaving everything to the hired hands. He still refused to

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sleep in his and Caroline's bedroom and moved into a guest room beside Rebecca's.

The tenth of June, the day of Rebecca's birthday party arrived. Aunt Miriam and her two girls came to help with the decorations. Miriam baked a cake and the girls prepared some punch in the kitchen. Millicent was a seventeen-year-old curly-headed blonde with bright blue eyes and Emily, a fifteen-year-old, had her sister's same fair hair and complexion except her hair was straight instead of curly.

"I'm so excited for you, Rebecca!" Millicent exuded cheerfully as she stirred the punch.

"Me too!" exclaimed Emily.

"Thank you all so much for doing this for me!" Rebecca smiled at them.

Miriam carried the punch into the dining room and placed it on the table next to the birthday cake. "The guests should be arriving soon."

Rebecca wore a burgundy dress that her Aunt Miriam purchased especially for her birthday and she looked striking in it with her black hair and dark eyes. But, Rebecca didn't see her own beauty. She was too busy comparing herself to her cousins and wishing she had their fair complexion and shimmering blonde hair. They were petite - barely five feet tall whereas Rebecca had olive skin, dark hair and eyes and stood five foot eight.

Someone knocked on the front door and Emily scurried to open it. It was Annette Silverton and Beatrice Rodgers. Rebecca really didn't want to invite Annette, but she liked Beatrice and everywhere Beatrice went, Annette followed. They'd been best friends since childhood and if you invited

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one, you had to invite the other. Ethan stepped into the foyer and helped greet the guests as they arrived.

"Happy Birthday, Rebecca!" Annette and Beatrice chimed in unison.

"Thank you! Thank you for coming," Rebecca greeted as Emily shut the door behind them and another carriage pulled up outside.

"You may as well leave that door open, Emily," Ethan suggested. Guests began arriving and entering the house. Among them was the handsome Stephen Phillips. Upon entering the door, he lifted his hat from his auburn head. He wore a neatly trimmed beard and mustache and his blue eyes twinkled as he took Rebecca's hand and kissed it.

"Happy Birthday, Miss Marchant. Thank you for inviting me."

"Thank you for coming Mr. Phillips," she smiled at the Derby winner's son.

"How are you doing, Sir?" Mr. Phillips greeted Ethan with a firm handshake.

"Very well, very well! And you?" Ethan replied

"Wonderful!" Stephen Phillips answered.

"How's your father doin'? Still starin' at that trophy, I bet?" Ethan chuckled.

Stephen laughed warmly and replied, "Father's doing very well, Mr. Marchant."

Miriam loved to entertain so she began gathering everyone into the dining room, "I'd like to welcome everyone to Rebecca's birthday party. Thank you for coming. First, we'll play a game of croquet in the backyard and then we'll have sandwiches, punch and cake after the game. So if

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everyone will follow me..." She motioned for the group to follow her out the back door where she and her daughters had set up the croquet course.

Mr. Phillips stayed at Rebecca's side the entire time. His constant presence made the other young men feel that he had already laid claim to Rebecca so they each found their own companion for the afternoon.

"I hope croquet isn't too childish of a game for you, Mr. Phillips," Rebecca offered apologetically thinking a man in his twenties would have no desire for games.

"You're never too old for croquet, Miss Marchant," he smiled as he hit the ball with the mallet and it shot ten feet and sailed through the wicket.

"Good shot!" Rebecca congratulated.

After their game concluded, the party went indoors to enjoy their refreshments. Mr. Phillips' constant companionship made Rebecca a little uneasy. She wasn't used to any young man paying her such rapt attention. While she enjoyed his company and the pleasant conversation, she would have been more comfortable if only girls had been invited to the party.

Mr. Phillips was the last guest to leave. As Rebecca saw him to the door, he pulled a small box wrapped in white paper with a bright red ribbon around it from his pocket. "I brought you a little gift, Miss Marchant."

"How thoughtful of you, Mr. Phillips!" she smiled up into his blue eyes and took the box from his hands. She opened it to find a pair of bright red riding gloves.

"These are lovely. Thank you!" she smiled as her fingers caressed the smooth red velvet.

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"I was hopin' you might go ridin' with me tomorrow. You can wear them then," he smiled.

"Tomorrow?" she hesitated and looked to her father who leaned his shoulder against his study door watching Mr. Phillips' departure. Ethan nodded and Rebecca answered, "Yes, I suppose I could do that."

"How does ten tomorrow mornin' sound?" he suggested
"That'll be fine," she agreed.

He stepped out the front door and tipped his hat, "I'll see you tomorrow then, Miss Marchant. Thank you for a lovely afternoon." He turned and walked toward his carriage and Rebecca shut the door.

Immediately Emily and Millicent ran up to her, each one clutching one of her arms in their hands, "Rebecca! I believe the handsome Mr. Phillips is completely smitten with you!" Millicent exuded.

"Oh, I'm sure he was just being nice," Rebecca waved her hand as if it were nothing.

"Surely you're not *that* blind, Rebecca!" Millicent teased.
"It's obvious that he's enchanted by you."

"*Enchanted?* Oh, please Millicent! You're always so melodramatic." Rebecca rolled her eyes, set her gloves in their gift box on a table in the foyer and started toward the dining room to help Miriam clean.

"Mother, don't you think Mr. Phillips is completely smitten by Rebecca?" Millicent tugged her mother's arm.

"Oh, yes, it's obvious he's simply enchanted by you!" Miriam smiled at Rebecca and then winked at Millicent.

"You too are just silly!" Rebecca took a handful of dishes into the kitchen and prepared to wash them in a dishpan.

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“No, no, Rebecca! No dishes for you today. It’s your birthday. The girls and I will take care of that. Go put those beautiful riding gloves from the man who isn’t smitten with you in your room,” Miriam teased.

As Rebecca left the kitchen Emily called out, “You know that red is the color of love don’t you, Rebecca?” Emily, Millicent and Miriam burst into giggles as Rebecca shook her head in frustration and closed her eyes.



Over the next two months, Stephen Phillips became Rebecca’s riding companion nearly three times each week. He frequently brought her little trinkets and they became good friends. She enjoyed his company and he helped alleviate some of the loneliness that Rebecca felt from the loss of her mother.

The last morning in August after one of their rides through the Kentucky countryside, Rebecca and Stephen dismounted their horses and tied them to a tree. Stephen extended his arm and Rebecca took it with her gloved hand. He guided her over to a small fishing pond on the West side of the Marchant property.

“Miss Marchant,” he turned and took her hands in his, “We’ve become close over the last couple months, wouldn’t you say?”

“Yes, we’ve become good friends, Mr. Phillips,” she nodded.

He reached in his pocket and pulled out a small box. Rebecca’s stomach felt queasy. He opened the box and knelt

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on one knee, still holding her hand in his left hand as he extended the open box to her with his right, "I'd like for us to be more than friends, Miss Rebecca. I'd like... well, what I mean to say is will you marry me?"

Rebecca stood there unable to speak, staring at the full karat diamond engagement ring. She hadn't expected anything like this so soon. While she enjoyed Stephen's company, she saw him only as a friend. He was kind, gentle, and fun. But he felt more like a brother than a lover.

"I - I'm flattered, Mr. Phillips. May I have some time to think on it? Perhaps speak with my father?"

"I did ask your father for your hand and he agreed that I may have it if you are willing to give it." He thought perhaps she didn't realize he'd already asked for her father's permission.

"I'd like a little time to think it over if I may, Mr. Phillips?" she asked again, still staring at the ring in his hand without taking it from him.

Stephen rose to his feet, "Certainly, take all the time you need, but please, take the ring and wear it." He lifted the ring from the box and pulled the riding glove from her left hand and slipped the ring on her finger.

"It's beautiful, Mr. Phillips," she had to admit that. It was the most brilliant diamond she'd ever seen.

"And please, call me Stephen," he looked into her dark brown eyes

She swallowed the nervous lump which had formed in her throat as he leaned forward staring at her lips. Just as his lips would have met hers, Rebecca involuntarily turned her

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head and his kiss met her cheek. Somewhat embarrassed he pulled back to look into her eyes questioningly.

Nervously, she slipped the riding glove back on her hand and started back to the horses, "I promised my father we'd spend some time together this afternoon. I'll think over your generous proposal Mr. Phillips."

Perplexed, Stephen followed after her, mounted his horse and caught up with her as she rode back to the house.

"Is everything all right?" he finally asked after they'd ridden for nearly five minutes in silence.

"Oh, everything's fine. I'm just thinking," she smiled, hoping he wouldn't read the turmoil within her. What in the world would she tell him? She enjoyed his company and his friendship, but marriage? She didn't want to hurt him, but she also didn't want to marry someone she didn't love. Then again, marrying Stephen made sense. They came from horse breeding families, enjoyed the same things, lived comparable lifestyles and got along well together. But there was just no magic and while Rebecca could be a prude at times, she still held within her heart a longing for heart-pumping, toe-tingling romance. She doubted that would ever be possible with dear sweet Stephen.

When they reached the house, they tied their horses up and Rebecca invited Stephen in for a cool drink, but he declined. "I'll run along now. I have some business to attend to. You will think about my proposal won't you, Miss Rebecca?"

"Yes, I'll think about it. I promise," she smiled and then in an effort to make him feel less uneasy by her aloof reaction to his proposal, she put her hands around his neck, pulled

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his head forward and kissed his cheek. "Thank you, Stephen, I do so enjoy our time together."

Encouraged, he grinned, mounted his horse and rode away. He assumed that a fine young woman such as Rebecca had never been kissed and that her inexperience had been her reason for turning her cheek when he tried to kiss her earlier.

Ethan met Rebecca as she stepped into the house. She pulled off her riding gloves and laid them on the table.

"I take it you've accepted Mr. Phillips proposal then?" Ethan pointed to the ring on her finger.

"Oh, this?" Rebecca held up her hand. "Can you believe the size of this diamond, Papa?" Rebecca marveled that any man would spend such a fortune on her.

"You're worth it, Rebecca. Of course you don't understand that, but you are." Rebecca wondered how her father seemed to read her thoughts. Ethan approached her and put his hand to her cheek. "So you're going to marry him?"

"I told him I'd think about it. I didn't plan to take the ring but he insisted," she looked up into her father's eyes. "I really would like to talk with you about this. Are you up for that ride we planned to take?"

"Sure, I'd enjoy that," Ethan opened the door for Rebecca, allowing her to step outside and he followed, shutting the door behind them. Rebecca led her horse around to the water trough for a drink while Ethan saddled his horse and prepared to go riding.

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The horses traveled at an easy gait for several minutes and Ethan looked over to Rebecca, "So what did you want to talk about?"

"Do you think I should marry Stephen?" she asked.

"It's not my decision to make, sweetie," he stopped his horse and Rebecca turned hers to face him.

"But if it were your decision to make, would you tell me to marry him?" Rebecca pressed.

"Well, do you love him?" he searched her eyes for the truth. Whenever he did that, Rebecca knew that her father could read right through any façade she may put on. So she answered truthfully.

"I don't think so. I care for him as a friend, but I don't feel... there's no..."

"Spark?" he finished for her.

"Right, there's no spark. No magic. Is it even realistic to expect that or is that just the stuff from which fairy tales are made? We're definitely no Romeo and Juliet!" she chuckled.

"Well, you wouldn't want to be them anyway, sweetie. Just look how they ended up."

"True, but is it realistic to expect to feel something special or is it just supposed to feel comfortable, like an old well-worn shoe?"

"I'll be honest with you sweetie. In the beginning you usually feel some sparks and then after you're married for a while, it can get more like that well-worn shoe, but it's a shoe that you love and occasionally you'll still feel a spark or two that lets you know there's still a flame burnin'."

"So what you're telling me is that if I don't feel anything special now..."

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"I'm not tellin' you anything. Why don't you just think on it a spell? Pray about it and see what kind o' feelin' you get in a few days. Listen to your heart and you'll know what to do."

Rebecca sighed heavily.

"Let's get your mind off it for a spell. I'll race you over to that fence" he pointed to a fence a mile in the distance.

"All right, ready, set, go!" she called and their horses took off at full speed. They were neck-and-neck until about half-way when Rebecca's horse took the lead and she no longer noticed her father coming up alongside her. When she didn't hear his horse's hooves in pursuit, she turned her head to look behind her and saw that his horse had stopped and he lay in a heap on the ground beside it.

Rebecca quickly turned her horse and in lightning speed she had reached her father's side, dismounted and knelt on the ground beside him. "Papa! What's wrong?" She held his head in her lap.

"It's my heart! My arm's killin' me and ..." he winced in pain, clutching his chest.

"I'll go for help!"

"No... Rebecca, listen ... to ... me," he panted. "I should have... Before you decide ... anythin' ...return to Soquili." He gasped one last breath and sighed in a whisper, "Return to ... Soquili."

"Papa, please! Hang on Papa!" tears poured from her dark brown eyes as she knelt there sobbing with her father's head in her lap.

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Rebecca stood beside her father's open grave with tears cascading from her cheeks, clutching a handful of rich dirt in her hand. She released it and the soil scattered noisily atop the casket. Stephen put his arm around her pulling her away from the grave. Aunt Miriam and Uncle Dan along with Emily and Millicent gathered around her embracing each other as they wiped tears from their eyes with handkerchiefs.

Into Rebecca's mind drifted her father's dying words, "Return to Soquili." Rebecca lifted her gaze to her aunt. "I must go see Grandma at Soquili."

"What do you mean, Rebecca?" Miriam asked and Stephen studied Rebecca intently.

"Papa's last words to me were 'Return to Soquili.' I must go to Georgia immediately."

"You can't run off to Georgia now, Rebecca. You need time to grieve properly," Stephen insisted.

"No I must go immediately," Rebecca countered.

"What *exactly* did Ethan tell you when he died, Rebecca?" Miriam's brow furrowed with concern.

"He said 'I should have... Before you decide anythin' return to Soquili.' And then he repeated it again 'Return to ... Soquili.' And then he died. Do you know what he meant, Aunt Miriam?"

"Before you decide what? What were you trying to decide?" Miriam asked.

Rebecca looked hesitantly toward Stephen, "We had been discussing Mr. Phillips' marriage proposal, so I think he

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meant for me to return to Soquili before I decided on the proposal. I just don't understand why. Do you?"

"I have no idea why you'd need to go to Georgia or how that would relate to your decision. I do know that I can't take you to Georgia anytime soon. There's too much to be done on your father's estate and the girls and..." Miriam began.

"No, I don't need you to go with me. I can catch a train straight to Chattanooga and have Grandma pick me up there," Rebecca explained.

"You can't go to Georgia alone, Rebecca! I'll accompany you," Stephen insisted.

"She can't travel with *you*, Mr. Phillips!" Miriam pointed out the impropriety of such a situation.

"I want to go alone. If there's somethin' father should have told me or done that relates to Soquili, I want to discover it for myself... alone," Rebecca turned to her family members, "Could I please have a moment with Mr. Phillips?"

"Certainly dear," Miriam and the others started back toward the house. As soon as they were out of hearing distance, Rebecca pulled the diamond ring from her left hand and handed it to Stephen, "Here's your ring Mr. Phillips. I can't accept it."

"But your father said not to decide until *after* you visited Soquili. Don't turn me down yet. Keep the ring," Stephen refused to take it.

"Please take it, Stephen, for safe keeping at least. I'll wait on my decision, but I can't possibly take such a valuable piece of jewelry with me when I'm traveling alone so far from home."

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Reluctantly Stephen took the ring, "All right, but I'm holdin' it for you for when you return. It's yours and my proposal stands."

She patted his arm, "I know, Stephen, but I'll not leave you hanging. As soon as I discover what Papa was tryin' to tell me, I'll make my decision and I'll let you know my answer."

"How long will you be gone?" Stephen's eyes puckered with worry.

"As long as it takes. It may be months. So please don't wait for me. If you need to go on with your life, please don't wait for me."

"I'll wait as long as it takes," Stephen insisted resolutely. "I love you, Rebecca."

"I care a great deal for you too, Stephen." She hugged her friend, burying her head in his shoulder as tears flowed.

He held her in his arms stroking her silky black hair and let her cry on his shoulder until finally he asked, "When will you leave?"

"I'll write Grandma and as soon as I hear back from her, I'll buy my train ticket to Chattanooga. I'll stay with Aunt Miriam until then."

Rebecca's Reveries

About the Author

Marnie L. Pehrson and her family purchased 24 acres of the former hundred-acre, Battlefield Stables bordering the Chickamauga Battlefield at an auction in 1996. She and her sister's families designed and built houses next to each other on the historic landscape which inspired *Rebecca's Reveries*.



Marnie and her husband Greg are the parents of six children. She is the founder of multi-denominational SheLovesGod.com which hosts the annual SheLovesGod Virtual Women's Conference the 3rd week of October each year. Subscribe to her free weekly Bible study lesson on the site. Marnie has served in many capacities within her church in presidencies of the women's and children's organizations, as a Sunday School teacher and pianist. Recent service as family history consultant inspired her foray into historical fiction. Visit www.pwgroup.com to learn about Marnie's other projects and works.

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