

“With exquisite dialogue, beautiful descriptions, and careful attention to detail, Carolyn Miller continues to draw her readers into a magnificent Regency world with her newest novel, *Winning Miss Winthrop*. I cannot help but compare the longing of two hearts separated by misunderstandings to Jane Austen’s *Persuasion*. Miller creates a world with such clarity that the plights of Catherine and Jonathan grip the reader with compassion and uncertainty until the very end. And the sweetness? Yes, the romantic tension pings with unrequited love which still simmers beneath the surface of two wounded hearts. Well done, Carolyn Miller. *Winning Miss Winthrop* is a beautiful journey of healing, hope, and forgiveness.”

PEPPER D. BASHAM, author of the *Penned in Time*
and the *Mitchell’s Crossroads* series

“Carolyn Miller never fails to stir my heart with her engaging Regency novels, and she has done it again with *Winning Miss Winthrop*. This delightful story has just the right blend of family drama, faith, romance, and redemption. Separated by a heartbreaking misunderstanding in the past, Catherine and Jon’s journey will keep you turning pages and longing for them to learn the truth. Readers who are looking for an English historical romance reminiscent of Jane Austen and Georgette Heyer will be delighted with *Winning Miss Winthrop*!”

CARRIE TURANSKY, award-winning author of
Across the Blue and *Shine Like the Dawn*

“Fans of Christian Regency romances by Sarah Ladd, Sarah Eden, and Michelle Griep will adore Carolyn Miller’s books!”

DAWN CRANDALL, award-winning author of
The Everstone Chronicles

“*Winning Miss Winthrop* is a touching, charming tale of love won and lost and won again. Carolyn Miller writes with skill and grace that brings the Regency period to vivid life. I hope there are more books coming!”

—JULIANNA DEERING, author of the *Drew Farthering Mysteries*

“Carolyn Miller doesn’t disappoint with yet another engaging Regency novel that keeps you turning pages right to the end and leaves you wanting more. Two individuals, overwhelmed by the hurt and haunting of the unknown, break the shackles of their pain and the shadows of their past to move forward on a path of forgiveness and redemption. With impeccable accuracy, witty dialogue, and seamless integration of Christian faith, Carolyn weaves a classic tale that is sure to become a permanent addition to your collection.”

—AMBER STOCKTON, best-selling author of *Liberty’s Promise*



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WINNING
MISS WINTHROP

CAROLYN MILLER

 Kregel
Publications

Winning Miss Winthrop

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For my friend Jacqueline



*Sister in Christ, encourager, &
beta reader extraordinaire*

 CHAPTER ONE

Gloucestershire
May 1816

THE DEEPLY BLUE Gloucestershire sky brought comfort as Catherine Winthrop emerged from the tenant farmhouse. She drew in a deep breath of clover-scented air then turned to the farmer. “I am sure the doctor will be able to relieve poor Anne more than I. I’ll have word sent as soon as I return.”

“Thank ye, miss.”

Catherine placed her basket on the seat of the gig then deftly climbed past the large spoked wheels. “I hope to be back in a few days to check on her. In the meantime, be sure that she does no unnecessary work as we both know she is wont to do.”

Farmer Hassop touched his forehead in farewell.

Catherine snapped the reins and the gig jerked into motion. Soon Ginger had brought her to a fresh-mown meadow, the scent of which tickled her nose, and brought further ease to her heart. Over the brook, whose burble and swish recalled summer days of dipping her toes—when Mama was not looking, of course—willows arced gracefully, their twisting branches gilded in the late afternoon sun, contrasting beautifully with the green fields and the rich browns of furrowed earth.

The bright colors were a salve to the turbulence of the past hour. Poor Anne. Her cough had not improved any, despite Nurse’s tonics,

and she could not help suspect Farmer Hassop would not let his hardworking wife rest as much as she needed. Poor lady, married to a man who, while not a brute, was said to be one of the most selfish men in the neighborhood. Poor, misled Anne.

But then, Catherine knew only too well how easily a man could fool a woman.

The old ache in her heart panged again. But no good came of thinking like that. She shook her head at herself, and chose instead to fix her attention on the perfect patch of bluebells dancing in the light breeze. Early May was the perfect time to view the countryside in all its glory, and Nelly's Wood was the most spectacular locale. Bluebells, the delicate whites and pinks of wood anemones and yellow cowslips, even the last gold of daffodils could be appreciated anew amongst such a froth of color.

"Is it not lovely, Ginger?"

The chestnut mare tossed her head, as if in reply.

"Wait here."

Within a minute she had secured the reins, slipped from the gig, and was collecting great armfuls of the spring blossoms. She trekked back to the cart and placed the flowers on the seat next to her before climbing in and recommencing her journey.

"I'm sure Nelly, whoever she is, could never have appreciated such a fine sight as we. Do you not agree?"

Ginger nickered her concurrence and Catherine smiled.

The next farm was over a ridge. The Jeffcoat family had farmed this section of land for hundreds of years, their hard work evident in everything from the carefully maintained outbuildings to the precise capping atop the stonewalls. What a shame such heritage would be lost with the eventual demise of the current farmer, for without a capable son . . .

A tall form lumbered into view, broad face splitting into a smile. "Hello, Miss Cathy."

"Hello, Jack." She pulled to a stop outside the stone farmhouse. "How are you today?"

"Verra well, Miss Cathy. Is this your horse?"

“Yes, this is Ginger. You’ve met Ginger before, remember?”

Wide blue eyes stared at her, uncomprehendingly.

Catherine’s heart panged. “Tell me, Jack, is your mother within?”

“Yes, Miss Cathy.”

A somewhat squat form bustled from the farmhouse, wiping her hands on a floury apron. “Ah, Miss Winthrop. I thought it might be you. I hope Jack is behaving himself?”

“He always does, Mrs. Jeffcoat.”

“Well, that be a relief to hear.” She shot a narrow look at her son, towering over them both, before her gaze returned to Catherine. “And how be your mother and father?”

“Very well, thank you.”

Although perhaps Papa was not *quite* as well as he could be. Since their recent return from London he’d seemed somewhat tense, closing himself in his study these past days, snapping at whoever dared speak to him, barely acknowledging Mama, although Catherine could not really blame him for that. Any chance to escape her mother’s zealous desire to know everything was something both Papa and Catherine eagerly seized upon, hence her longer than usual trip to the tenant farms today.

Catherine smiled. “They send their best.” Well, they would if they thought to.

“I’m sure.” Mrs. Jeffcoat smiled thinly. “Now, what can we be helping you with today?”

“Well, I told Cook that I thought a gooseberry fool would be just the thing for Father, and she said our gooseberries hadn’t come on yet and, knowing yours are always early, I was hoping you might have some that you were willing to sell.”

“Ah. Well, I had hoped to use them for my own man, but I suppose—”

“No, no, Mrs. Jeffcoat! I wouldn’t dream of taking supplies destined for your husband. It was only if you had extra.”

The older woman sighed. “Yes, but feeding my husband won’t pay so good as selling to you, so I s’pose we can reach an arrangement.”

“Oh, but—”

"No, let me not hear another word. I'm sure 'is lordship will get as much pleasure from them as my John would've." She shot Catherine a keen glance then waddled back inside the farmhouse.

Catherine shifted on the gig's leather seat, fighting the pangs of guilt her request had ignited. Yet Mrs. Jeffcoat *had* agreed, and she would be paid a fair price . . .

"Hello, Miss Cathy."

She turned to the gangling farmer's son and forced up her lips. "Hello, Jack."

"Is this your horse?"

"Yes." Her eyes blurred for a moment. Poor Mrs. Jeffcoat. How hard it must be, that the longed-for son be unable to carry the weight of their hopes and dreams. But Jack wasn't the moonling so many people thought. She'd often thought he'd make an excellent groom. He was very capable of caring for animals, and she'd seen his strength out in the fields. "Strong as an ox," Farmer Jeffcoat would say, desperate pride in his eyes . . .

But as Lavinia said, Mrs. Jeffcoat couldn't have known she would catch measles during her confinement. Jack's condition wasn't his fault, just as being sonless wasn't Papa's.

Her nose twitched as the scents of cows and dung grew with the lengthening shadows. When Jack wasn't murmuring to her horse he would stare at Catherine so steadily her skin would prickle. It was all she could do not to tell him to look away. She glanced elsewhere instead, thinking of her earlier visit to Lizzie, once a maid at Winthrop, whose excitement at her recent marriage was augmented with the news she was already increasing, and Jem, her farmer husband hopeful of a healthy boy by autumn. She knew she should be as shocked as Mama about the speed at which such things had occurred, but instead, could not help but feel a tad wistful, her envy mixed with a measure of anxiety. *Please, God, help Lizzie's babe be healthy . . .* And not as the boy-man who stood staring at her.

Relief unfurled within when Mrs. Jeffcoat finally reappeared. She placed a wooden pail half filled with the bright green fruit onto the seat next to the flowers.

“Oh, thank you, Mrs. Jeffcoat.”

“They be a bit early, likely to be quite tart.”

“I’m sure Papa will be very pleased.”

The farmer’s wife nodded. They worked out fair recompense then Catherine picked up the reins again.

“I’ll be sure to fix you up tomorrow. Thank you again, Mrs. Jeffcoat, Jack.”

“Goodbye, Miss Cathy.”

And flashing a final guilt-laden smile, she encouraged Ginger to head for home.

She had no need for self-reproach, she thought, as the gig bumped over muddy tracks. Just as Mrs. Jeffcoat was not responsible for her son’s mental culpability, neither was Catherine responsible for her family’s wealth and status. Papa couldn’t help inheriting Grandfather’s great fortune along with his title and lands, just as Cousin Peter would one day, too. Inheritance and good fortune were situations to thank God for, not feel guilt about, especially when she did whatever she could to help those less fortunate.

The road curved to the Winthrop gates. She lifted a hand as the gatehouse keeper’s children waved, and encouraged Ginger to quicken her pace. As the trees met overhead across the drive, a chill passed over her. Evening was drawing near, and she wasn’t used to being out quite so late. But still, her time had proved worthwhile. Papa was sure to love the berries, and the flowers *might* appease Mama . . .

Ahead, she caught a glimpse of lighted second-story windows, the curtains not yet drawn, despite the approaching dark. She frowned. Why hadn’t the maids closed them? Why hadn’t Mama scolded them into fulfilling their duties?

She passed the stone pillars marking entry to the Manor garden proper. At the *porte cochère* stood the doctor’s carriage.

Her heart cantered with unease. Why was the doctor here? She pulled hard at the reins, the wheels skidding to a stop.

“Oh, Miss Winthrop! Everyone has been looking for you!” Geoffrey hurried toward her, his extreme fastidiousness not evident for

once, as he condescended to hold the reins. "They're waiting for you inside."

"Who is waiting?" She climbed down, picked up her flowers, the fruit for her father.

"Your mother, and the doctor, and—" The butler swallowed.

Her neck prickled. Why did he refuse to look her in the eyes? She hurried inside. "Mama?"

She handed her spoils to William, who waited as she stripped off her hat and gloves before murmuring, "They're upstairs, miss."

She nodded and hastened up the enormous oak staircase that had cost her father thousands when he had remodeled five years ago. "Mama?"

A wail sounded. Heart racing, Catherine hurried past Serena's vacant room and entered her mother's bedchamber. Christie glanced up from where she was waving smelling salts under Mama's nose, her knit brow and nod to the adjoining room suggesting that whatever was amiss was very serious indeed.

"His Lordship's in there, miss," she murmured. "The doctor's in with him, but . . ."

Catherine hurried into her father's room, the huge four-poster bed dominating the domain, its very size seeming to shrink her father as he lay, shrouded in the middle.

"Oh, Papa!"

Her father turned, gray-faced, gasping.

The doctor glanced up. "I'm sorry, Miss Winthrop, but there is nothing more I can do."

"No, no!" She hurried to the bed. "Father, Papa, please . . ." She glanced at Carrick, who had served Papa for years. "What can be done?"

He lifted his hands in a helpless gesture. "I am sorry, Miss Catherine, but he has been this way since clutching his arm nearly two hours ago now."

While she'd been off picking flowers! "No, no, Papa, I need you. Please don't—" She swallowed the word, as if hearing it aloud would bring it to fruition. "Lord God, have mercy!"

But it seemed God had none, as her father stiffened, then, with a final broken sigh, died.



White's Gentlemen's Club, London

"I lay you ten guineas the next lady who walks past is a complete fright."

"Only ten? I wager five-and-twenty. What say you, Carlew?"

Jonathan Carlew looked up from his newspaper at his two companions. "I say a fool and his money are quickly parted."

"Well, nobody shall ever accuse you of being a fool, you stingy old man," Viscount Henry Carmichael said, tease in his eyes.

Jon hid his smile. Who would have thought one day's difference in their birth dates would lead to years of such jests? "What some call stingy others call wise."

"Your modesty overwhelms." Major Thomas Hale, the third member of the party, snorted. "Now, Carmichael, here comes our next contender. What say you, ugly or divine?"

"Must it be one or the other?" Jon asked.

"My dear fellow, a woman is either decidedly pretty or decidedly not."

"One simply has to decide which of the two?" Jon suggested.

"Exactly." The heir to the Earl of Bevington nodded.

"But surely that implies a degree of subjectivity, if, as the poets say, beauty does lie in the eye of the beholder."

The major lifted his glass to peer through the bow window. "Well, I behold a fright. Carmichael, you owe me a pony."

The viscount handed over twenty-five pounds, muttering about the audacity of such ladies to walk without consideration for the eyes of men.

"Can you imagine what the ladies must think of such ogling?"

"Ogling! Carlew, I resent the implication."

"My apologies, Hale, but I meant no implication."

Carmichael laughed. "You are a sly dog, Carlew. Next you will be saying a woman's appearance ought count for nothing."

Jon merely smiled.

"Well may it be for some to be fastidious about such things, but good heavens, if a man means to be leg-shackled then let it be to a lady whom he finds pleasing to gaze upon."

"Does that hold true for the lady in question also? Indeed, if this line of reasoning is so, there would be many of us destined to singlehood on account of our less than perfect looks."

The major gave a loud harrumph as Carmichael said, "You seem to forget the numbers of ladies at the ball last week who seemed very willing to overlook *your* ill-favored face."

The tips of Jon's ears grew hot. "I confess it had slipped my mind."

That evening in question had been one of the more excruciating of his life. Perhaps if he'd learned to flirt like Carmichael or Hale he might be more successful in ensuring the women who flocked to him knew not to expect anything more than a deftly turned compliment. But as Hale had commented that evening, Jon's more serious demeanor and deep voice lent a gravity to his words that only seemed to encourage the clinging young ladies with whom he had no desire to further his acquaintance.

"Next you'll be saying a woman should not be judged on her face."

"Should a man?"

His companions both stared at him before Hale gave another loud harrumph.

"Carlew, your observations are both unnecessary and unkind. Go back to your paper if you don't mind."

Jon chuckled, shook his head at his friends' antics, and retired once more behind the screen of *The Times*. His smile faded, the printed words before him meaningless. While he didn't begrudge them—they were his friends, who had helped keep him sane these past years when India had a way of hardening even the kindest of men—he couldn't help but wonder how these gentlemen would rate the woman who had once caught his eye. Not strictly pretty, let alone divine, he couldn't help but think she'd rate rather poorly on Hale's scale of attractiveness.

His fingers clenched. Relaxed. Not that he should care. These were foolish thoughts. He was unlikely to see her, and even if he did, she had long ago made her feelings abundantly clear.

No. Perhaps he was a fool after all. Surely two years of adventure and business should have been enough to rid him of these feelings.

Perhaps it was time to think on a lady who might not mind his connections to trade, at least until that far away day when he might assume the title. His earnings from his time on the Indian subcontinent should, correctly invested, hold out for quite a few more years, and the interest on his shares in his father's companies was steadily improving, so Trelling said. Perhaps there was a lady who might not mind being married to such a man. He could offer constancy, and quite a tidy fortune, if little else.

His spirits dipped.

Perhaps one day there might even be one prepared to overlook the haze concerning the legitimacy of his birth.