

# *Lady Barbara & the Buccaneer*

*a short spicy romance*

*Regency Rakes & Rebels*  
*Book II*



**Charisse Howard**

*Carnival on Grand Terre! One last masquerade before Lady Barbara sails home to London. Or will she be captured and plundered by the Black Buccaneer?*

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## ***PART ONE: BARATARIA***

### ***Chapter 1: Harlequin***

“Don’t be such a stick, Barbara. What are you afraid of?”

Franklin Huxtable sprawled on a cushion in the *Pelican’s* stern, his hand draped over her tiller. With his white shirt open to the breeze, one leg crooked over a thwart, and his tawny curls tossing about his neck, he looked as lazy and ornamental as an odalisque.

“If you are so curious to see a Carnival, why will you not go?”

Lady Barbara Poole sat upright, leaning against the mast. “You know very well, Frank. It isn’t seemly for a twenty-two-year-old widow to visit Grand Terre at night, much less with a single gentleman.”

She tugged at her cotton skirt for emphasis, and shifted her position to keep the little sloop’s mainsail between her face and the sun. Oh, for a wide floppy fisherman’s hat like her uncle Huxtable’s! Bonnets always caught the wind and choked her, or else blew off in the first puff.

Lieutenant Jasper Bagley, her late husband, had adored his bride’s thick auburn hair and peaches-and-cream complexion. For Lady Barbara, four years of fair skin in a balmy climate had meant endless vigilance against sunburn and freckles.

“Single gentleman?” Frank languidly stretched his arms. “I’m your cousin, for God’s sake.”

“You’re single, nevertheless, and more or less a gentleman, in your own odd way. Besides, we have had no invitation.”

“It’s a festival, dear girl! They don’t issue invitations.”

She shaded her eyes and looked back at the long spit of land where they had just filled two large boxes with supplies. “Who doesn’t? Who has arranged this Carnival? Jean Laffite and his band of buccaneers?”

He laughed. “Considering that Grand Terre is their island, I daresay they have. Perhaps this is their way of expressing gratitude to all of us who buy their goods.”

“And to all of the ships’ captains who unwillingly surrendered them? And all of the customs officials whose coffers are empty?”

“Their coffers may be empty, but not their pockets. But never mind them!”

Frank wriggled up so that he could fix her with a commanding glare.

“Think of it, Barbara! Here we are in the exotic land of Louisiana, which, for your own odd reasons, you have determined to leave. And tonight of all nights is its greatest spectacle! When will you ever again have a chance to watch fishwives and Creoles and buccaneers reveling under a half-French, half-American moon? Never, by George!”

“And just as well,” Barbara retorted, “since we are at war with both the French and the Americans.”

Frank ignored her interruption. “Next Shrove Tuesday you’ll be in dull old London, poor girl, gazing upon the bleak Thames River instead of shining Barataria Bay. Would you rather recall the glories of Carnival on Grand Terre, or curse yourself for a coward who dared not go?”

Barbara quailed to hear her cousin’s favourite word, and hoped he had not noticed it. “Next Shrove Tuesday I assure you I shall be far too busy dining and dancing—”

“I dare you!”

Alas! He had noticed it.

“You can wear a mask, Barbara. No one will recognise you. We’ll go in costume, as Harlequin and what’s-her-name. A mystery to all! Only you and I shall remember, as we grow old and grey in Grand-Isle-on-Barataria or Strand-on-Thames, that once we were young and bold and had glorious adventures. I dare you!”

Lady Barbara Poole let out a long sigh.

“Columbine.”

Frank grinned, but quickly suppressed it. “That’s it. Harlequin and Columbine. I’ll meet you on the dock at eight.”

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Back in the cottage she shared with her mother, Barbara rummaged in the wooden trunk at the foot of her bed.

Frank probably didn’t remember, but she did. The last time she had worn her Columbine dress was for her wedding.

What a confounding business life is!

When she and her mother moved here from London four years ago, Lady Barbara Poole had brought her two best gowns. She never wore them.

On this small patch of beaches, farmland, and wind-stunted trees, no one dressed formally for dinner. No one attended soirées, concerts, or the theatre. Frank did bathe and change clothes between a day of fishing and their evening meal. His father—who had lost half a leg in the war—was not always so particular.

By the time the family was invited to a masked ball in New Orleans, both gowns were stiff and spotted with mildew.

Barbara’s resourceful aunt salvaged bits to sew her a different kind of costume. Out of her ruined finery came a colourful dress and a patchwork apron for Columbine. There was enough left for a motley shirt for Frank as Columbine’s clown partner, Harlequin.

Blame the Americans! Mrs. Huxtable declared. No respect for tradition! As soon as they bought the Louisiana Territory from France, didn’t they stop our Mardi Gras?

The local fishermen, farmers, and smugglers had found other ways to celebrate. Festivals and disguises were part of their heritage—perhaps because so many of them made their living on the sea and off the books.

It’s true what Frank said, Barbara reflected with an inner sigh. Who will recognise me at Carnival? What place have I to protect in society, where there is no society?

Her wedding had been a pallid shadow of the grand day she had dreamt of since childhood. A pastor was only available on Sunday, following the chapel service held every other week in a spruced-up boat-house. Even with every household on the island attending, half the congregation was family.

Barbara took it in stride. What harm in a small wedding next to the other shocks she had endured?

Most horrible had been the news two years earlier of Lord Poole's death in a Mediterranean sea battle. For his wife and daughter, the dark London winter became a living tomb of sleet, mud, and grief. Captain Huxtable's offer of a bright new home in a sunny climate came as a godsend.

And for a while, the breathtaking beauty of Grand Isle brought them comfort. Sand and surf in all directions made the world appear simple, manageable. Every morning the sky was a changing panorama of clouds scudding, birds soaring and diving, oaks and crape myrtles and oleanders sparkling in the sun. The sea was never still, shifting from pewter to jade to turquoise before their eyes.

And the hurricanes! How did this narrow strip of land manage to stay above water, with wild wind and rain invading it every summer? lashing every tree and cottage until it seemed no twig could remain standing?

Thanks to her cousin—whose fecklessness would have grated on her in London—Lady Barbara learned to relish both sunshine and storms. She also learned to sail and fish. In the little sloop *Pelican*, she and Frank explored the endless coves and islets of Baratavia Bay.

There it was!—a plump brown-paper packet tied with string. Barbara untied the knot, unfolded the paper, and shook out the dress.

With snug puff-topped jade-green sleeves, a laced pale-pink bodice, a pink-and-white flowered over-skirt, and a green ruffled under-skirt, its wrinkles would hardly show. Especially once she added the ruffled apron. Columbine was a servant character, after all, not meant to be neatly pressed.

The question was, Could she fasten herself into this colourful creation without help?

Captain Huxtable customarily turned a blind eye toward his son's night-time adventures. Boys would be boys. Wild oats must be sown. Least said, soonest mended.

Girls were another kettle of fish. The only way Barbara could join one of Frank's excursions was to keep it a secret.

Ah, there was her mask! Along with the apron, this was what turned her bridal dress into her Columbine costume: a stiff white lace-edged lorgnette which curved up on one side and down on the other, adorned at each peak with pink-and-white roses and ribands.

Frank was supposed to wear white face-powder under his own mask, but he might not bother. No one here will care, he assured her, the last time she objected to that and his plain canvas pantaloons. The point is not to be the character so much as to be disguised.

Dear exasperating Cousin Frank! How would she have survived this idyllic exile without him?

Two years ago, Barbara had confronted a dilemma. She had read every book in her uncle's meagre library. Frank Huxtable might make a dashing Harlequin, but he was not a potential husband. Unless Lady Barbara Poole cared to wed an oysterman or a smuggler, she must look beyond these barrier islands for her future.

She and her mother worried, then conferred, then agreed: They must return to London.

Lady Poole drafted a letter to their solicitor. Before she could post it, a ketch arrived from the naval station at Bermuda. Half a dozen junior officers who had served under Captain Huxtable were pleased to accept his invitation for Christmas.

Among them was Lieutenant Jasper Bagley.

He was not the handsomest of the group, nor the most brilliant—that would be the tall, dark, aloof Lieutenant Prevost. But whereas Prevost avoided the company of ladies, Bagley sought it out.

Mrs. Huxtable pronounced his diffident smile “charming.” Lady Poole quite liked his hazel eyes, and considered his ears and chin to be nicely shaped.

Lady Barbara, distracted by his more striking friend, did not notice this slight, shy young man at first. Lieutenant Bagley fell in love with her the very minute they were presented.

Although only a second son, he met Lady Poole’s requirements. Jasper Bagley was reasonably well-born, well-established, and presentable. Best of all, he was unmarried.

He courted Lady Barbara with poetry. He gave her slim volumes by Wordsworth and Southey. He told her stories from Thomas Malory. They strolled along the beach comparing London memories: Shakespeare’s plays, Mozart’s sonatas, the view from the Tower, Hyde Park, the Serpentine, picture galleries . . .

He wooed her mind, and her heart followed.

Lieutenant Bagley got his assignment to *HMS Highflyer* in mid-January. Three days before his departure, they married.

The wedding night was clumsy, full of haste, confusion, and dismay. In the morning they could hardly look at each other.

The second night was a turnabout. Jasper’s gentle affection, his clear delight in her, and the sweet warmth of falling asleep nestled into his shoulder made Barbara glad and proud to be his wife.

In the morning they could not stop looking at each other.

When Lieutenant Bagley stepped into the pinnace that would take him to the ketch that would take him to the *Highflyer*, his bride’s eyes remained fixed upon him until he dwindled to a speck.

In mid-April, the *Highflyer*’s squadron pursued four American schooners up the Rappahannock River. One of them had just come from a privateering run and was heavily manned and armed. Reports differed as to the number of British casualties.

Among them was Lieutenant Jasper Bagley.

Mrs. Bagley distinctly remembered that she loved him. She remembered that his hair was brown, and fell a certain way about his brow, and that his teeth were small and even. She remembered that in his arms she had felt cherished and glorious.

Yet in the four months since his departure, the picture she held in her heart had grown less and less distinct. By the time Barbara Bagley learned that she was a widow, she could no longer recall her husband’s face.

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