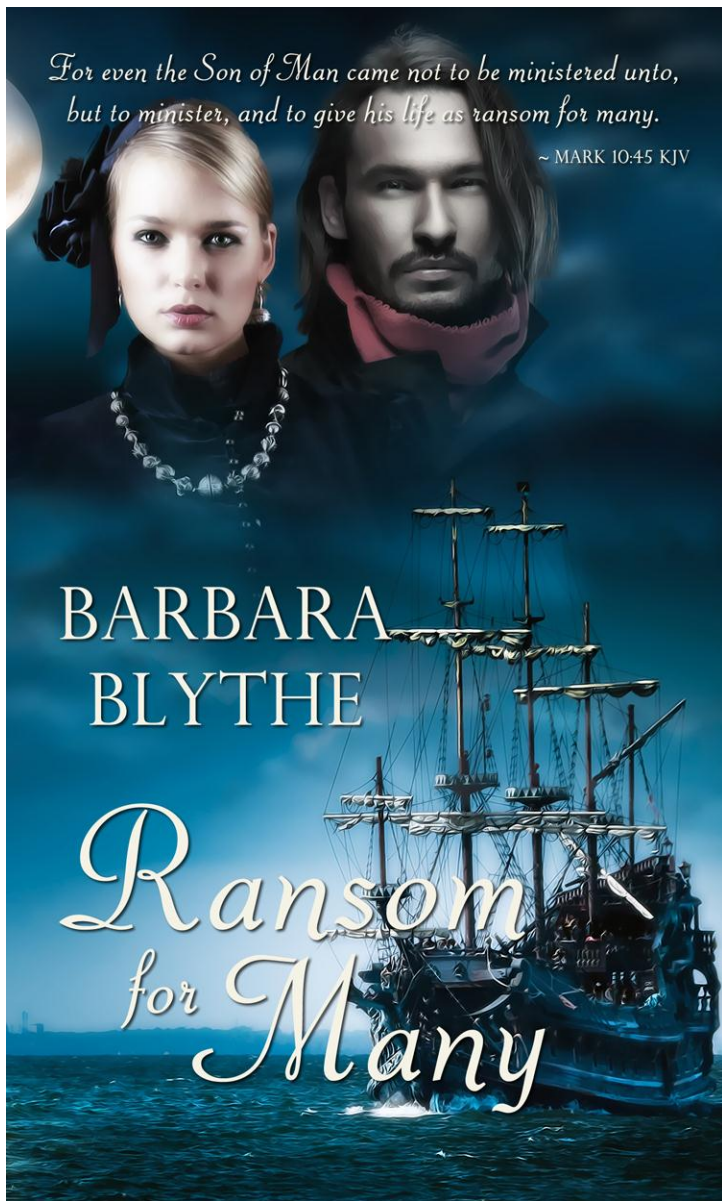


*For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto,
but to minister, and to give his life as ransom for many.*

~ MARK 10:45 KJV

BARBARA
BLYTHE

*Ransom
for Many*



RANSOM FOR MANY

Barbara Blythe

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RANSOM FOR MANY

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Dedication

To my support network: Mama, Barry, and God.
Thanks for your encouragement and your belief in me.

Praise for Barbara Blythe

Fire Dragon's Angel:

"...filled with suspense and action, highly entertaining." - Rush Fan

"Full of emotionally charged moments, the novel will keep you spell bound..." - Lynne Marie's Reviews

"...this is a must read..." - Diana Flowers

1

*October, 1703 — Beaufort County
Colony of North Carolina*

“Yield ta my demands, or walk the plank. Nae one dares defy Captain Lan.”

“I dare.” The brave, childish answer was accompanied by the lift of a small but defiant chin and the planting of tiny hands on nearly nonexistent hips.

The wind chose that moment to ruffle the little girl’s dark blonde curls, and so fascinated was Donlan MacGarrow, he nearly forgot to act the enraged pirate. But when six-year-old Carolene Montross, garbed in pink satin and lace, stomped on his bare foot and stuck out her tongue, he became the fearsome brigand.

“Aye, ye’re a brazen lass. I’ll hae none o’ that talk from a wee one such as yerself. Prepare ta meet the sharks.” Lan shoved his treasured spyglass, a gift from Cara’s father for his last birthday, into the band of his trousers and removed his sword, the weapon crudely fashioned from an old fence slat with a smaller piece tied on crosswise to serve as the hilt. Waving it menacingly, he anticipated Cara’s surrender.

Instead, she lunged with arms outstretched.

Lan stumbled, falling flat on his back. Wrested of his sword, the blunt tip grazed his throat while Cara planted her tiny, slipper-shod foot on his chest.

"Now you'll walk the plank and meet the sharks." Cara's glare rivaled that of the fiercest pirate that ever sailed the seven seas. Then she burst out laughing. She removed her foot and hopped up and down. "I got you. I got you." Sing-songing the words over and over, she danced around and clapped her hands. "I'm the bestest pirate, ever."

"Not for long." Lan sprang to his feet with a growl.

Squealing, Cara lifted her skirt and petticoats high, running with all her energy towards the kitchen and the protection of his grandmother, the Montross cook.

Of course, his duty was to protect the motherless child—a pledge he'd made to Master Montross. But at the moment, his sole aim was to recapture his prisoner and give no quarter. Cara would soon learn how fierce a pirate he really was.

Gaining on his prey, attack was imminent.

As he neared, Cara turned. Giggling and screeching louder than the gulls, she leapt over a broken section of fence, the very same from which Lan had found the perfect pieces for his sword.

He raced after her and jumped, but his bare foot snagged on a slat. Arms flailing, he struggled to keep his balance. Even so, he fell forward. A searing pain radiated from his nose, and with a loud groan, he rolled over. Reaching up, he touched the injured member, his fingers coming into contact with something warm and wet. The warm, wet stuff was blood. What was wrong with his nose?

"Oh, Lan."

Lan looked up through a haze of pain until his eyes focused on Cara, who knelt beside him.

"I'm so sorry. You're hurt." Her tears splashed his

face. "I didn't mean for you to be hurt. I just wanted to prove I could be a pirate, too. I'll bring Gran."

Before he could stop her, she was on her feet and flying towards the kitchen, a small structure fashioned of gray stone and chinked with an oyster shell mixture. He groaned again; he was in real trouble.

In no time, his gran, head of silver-red hair, eyes of sky-blue, and a no-nonsense Scottish manner, helped him to his feet, while pressing a cold, wet cloth to his nose. "Ye hae broken it fer sure and certain, Donlan MacGarrow." Her pronouncement was dire. "Ye'll probably hae a crook there e're after. Let's get ye to the kitchen and hae a good look."

Cara, still crying, clutched his gran's skirt.

"I told ye both nae an hour ago nae to be playin' pirate. Bloodthirsty cutthroats from the pits of fire they be. Good, God-fearing bairns hae nae business imitatin' them, even in play. Now look at ye, Lan. Yer fine, handsome nose is broken."

"It's m-m-my fault." Cara spoke between sobs. "I m-made him chase me."

"Ye did no such thing. It was his own foolhardiness tha placed him in this mess. And the master depends on him to keep ye out o' mischief. Lan, is this how ye repay Master Montross's kindness fer lettin' me bring ye here to live when ye not quite five and without mither or fither? The least ye can do is stay out o' trouble." Suddenly, she softened, her words gentler. "Come along, lad. I'll fix ye up best I can, nae tha ye deserve such, disobeyin' me as ye did."

Lan obediently went with his gran. Cara trailed, still sniffing. When Lan entered the warm kitchen, the smell of the baking gingerbread, usually tempting, turned his stomach.

Gran pushed him into a chair with spokes that poked his bony back. "Hold this to yer nose." A cloth was thrust into his hands, and he complied.

While the woman bustled about gathering up this and that, Cara squatted beside him, her sweet brown eyes huge and fearful. His pain was lessening, but it was kind of fun to see Cara carry on so.

"I'll make sure you're never hurted again." Tears trickled down her soft cheeks. "You're my bestest friend, and you always will be."

"Ah, Cara." He hoped he appeared as brave and grown as he believed himself to be, for it was only six months until he turned ten and three. "I'm not so badly hurt. Gran was right, I should nae hae been chasin' ye."

"But you always chase me. I should have let you catch me. It's my fault."

"Hush, lass. It'll be all right. Ye'll see."

Gran rejoined them, and Cara backed away as the woman set to work on his broken nose. When he looked for Cara a few minutes later, she had gone. His heart sank a little until something his gran did to his tender nose made him forget all about Cara as he uttered a loud, "Ouch!"

The sun set early in October, and as it did, a bright, yellow-orange glow surrounded the disappearing ball.

Lan sat on the outside steps of the kitchen while his gran and the scullery maid, April, a bonnie lass three years older than he, put the finishing touches on the supper for the main house. He'd be having his

meal not long after, and he'd be glad for it; he'd missed the midday repast thanks to his mishap.

Gingerly, he touched his nose, sore as it could be, but not hurting nearly so much thanks to some smelly stuff his gran had rubbed on it. Red, rust, and orange leaves rustled high above in the maples and oaks, while brown needles separated from the towering pines and drifted earthward.

Just as he'd about decided to go back inside the kitchen where it was warmer, he was surprised to see Cara and several of the black children from the laborers' quarters headed his way.

"I told them what happened, and they wanted to see your nose," Cara explained.

Lan became the center of attention as the boys—several of them hunting friends—and girls clamored to see his nose. He recounted his story, exaggerating just a bit and hoping the Lord would forgive him for doing so. Then the children drifted off, bound for the evening meal to be shared with their families in the cabins on the outer fringes of Montross property.

Cara sat beside him on the stone steps. "Your eye has purple-ly rings around it."

He'd already discovered that by looking into the bucket of water his gran kept near the hearth.

"Are you feeling better?"

"Much better. My nose looks worse than it feels. "See—everything is gaeing ta be all right." Sometimes the other children made fun of his brogue, but Cara never did. He came by the accent honestly for he, his gran, his mither and fither all hailed from the Highlands of Scotland. If his parents hadn't died of the fever on the voyage over, he might never have come to live at Montross Glen with his gran. Though he missed

his folks, he'd been so young they were now a distant memory, just as he supposed Cara's mother was, having died of yellow fever when Cara was but three years old. Lan squeezed her hand. "All's well."

"I was afraid you might die and leave me." Cara regarded him seriously. Lan knew she was thinking of her mother.

"It'd take more than a wee bump on me nose ta finish me. I'm not gaeing anywhere. I promised yer fither I'd always keep an eye on ye."

"And you always keep your promises." The child had become way too solemn. It was time to tease.

"I only keep promises to tall people."

"I'm going to grow tall."

"Not as tall as me."

The impish spark ignited in her eyes. "You're not so tall."

Cara was right. He was a bit on the short side, but Gran assured him he'd be spurting any time now.

"Do nae worry yer pretty head about me growing. I'll be as big and brawny as your fither. Ye'll see."

"So I'm forgiven?" Cara smiled, revealing dimples.

"Forgiven and all forgotten."

"Here you are, you scamp." The voice of Carroll Montross drew Lan's and Cara's gazes up. Carroll Montross, who hailed from the Cornish coast of England, had sailed to the colonies when not much older than Lan, holding the position of cabin boy. Now he owned his own ships. And his plantation, just a short ride outside the port village of Bath, was one of the largest in the North Carolina colony. But Master Montross didn't smile much, not since the death of his beloved wife.

Lan overheard his gran telling April the story of

how the master had met the beautiful Varolene St. Hilaire on one of his Caribbean voyages. When Varolene's father forbade her to wed the Englishman, they'd eloped.

Lan remembered the master's pretty and kind wife. Cara's hair was the same color as her mother's, but she had her father's dark eyes. And now Master Montross's lit up with a rare smile as he gazed upon his treasured child. Lan knew Cara was the only one who could make the man laugh.

"Papa, I was looking after Lan. I broke his nose." Contrition and misery tinged her words.

"Well, as I heard it, Master Lan was chasing you, and he tripped." There was a mischievous glint in the towering man's eyes. Tall and brawny was an apt description of Carroll Montross. With legs akimbo and bronzed arms folded across his broad chest, he gave the appearance of a man to be reckoned with. He had the look of a pirate. A nice pirate, not the kind that made a soul walk the plank.

"Pirates do nae trip," Lan informed them indignantly, his male pride wounded. "They take a misstep."

"I see," Master Montross said, as though learning something new. "Young lady, you're needed in the house so Miss Polly can wash your face before Mrs. MacGarrow brings in our dinner."

Polly Temple was Cara's companion and governess, and included, per Master Montross's instructions, Lan in their daily lessons. Miss Polly said he had an excellent mastery of geography and astronomy, two skills he'd need when he became captain of his own ship. Just like Carroll Montross.

"I think I should spend some time with Lan since

he's hurted."

"Hurt," Cara's father gently corrected. "You can visit Lan tomorrow. I'm leaving for Williamsburg at daybreak, and I'll be gone for three weeks. You'll have lots of time to spend together. Now, Lan, I'm relying on you to keep an eye on this imp." Master Montross ruffled Cara's unruly curls. "You'll have your work cut out for you."

"I'm up to the challenge." Lan grinned, even though it made his nose ache. Being asked to care for Cara was a duty Lan took seriously and considered an honor. The last thing he wanted to do was disappoint Carroll Montross.

"Then I leave Cara in good hands. Now, young lady, come along. There's a face to be washed."

Cara pecked Lan's cheek and, after giving him a shy smile, took her father's hand.

The two left, Cara skipping alongside her father. Barely discerned, but carried on the brisk air, was Master Montross's rare laugh.

Lan kept his promise to Carroll Montross for a week, until the weather warmed and his good friends, Sam and Joe, sons of the overseer, convinced him to go hunting. It was late when he returned, but he'd brought down a wild turkey and a pair of quail with his bow, for Gran to roast so she wouldn't be too mad. When he entered the kitchen, Gran wasn't there, and he knew it was time for her to prepare dinner for the big house.

April sat on a stool, sobbing into her apron.

Laying the game on the old, scarred table, he

hurried over to the girl, placing a hand on her shoulder. "April, are ye sick?"

"Oh, Lan, where have ye been?" She looked up with reddened eyes. "Something truly terrible has happened."

"Is Gran all right?" Fear twisted his stomach. If anything should happen to her...

"No, she's fine. She's up at the house with Mistress Polly, who is beside herself."

"April, tell me." Alarm made breathing difficult.

"It be the little miss." April released a heartrending sob. "Her grandfather came and took her. And the master still away in Williamsburg and no one here to stop the man. The little miss was crying something terrible, but it made no difference. She's gone, Lan. Gone."

When the enormity of April's words sank in, Lan turned and without a word, ran from the kitchen. Racing towards the brick two-and-a-half story house everyone called "the manse," his mind churned furiously. He burst through the rear door. Crying and sobbing came from the direction of the front parlor. If only he hadn't gone hunting with the Whaley lads. But when he left, Cara had been practicing the pianoforte with Miss Polly, painstakingly struck notes coming through the open window of the salon. He hadn't planned to be away long, but how was he to know something so terrible would happen?

Thoughts swam as he came upon his gran and Miss Polly hugging each other with teary faces.

Ramses, the butler, paced, hands pressed to both sides of his graying head. "I've failed Master Montross," the man repeated.

"Gran, where is Cara?" Stopping before the two

women who huddled on a silk-covered settle, he gulped air. Gran looked at him, agony etched in her eyes.

"Tha horrible grandfather came and took her. It was as though he ken Master Montross was away."

"Took her away? Where?"

"Probably back ta whatever land he's from." Gran's voice was sad. "We may ne'er see her again."

"That can't be. I won't let it be." Lan clenched his hands into fists. "Cara is my best friend."

"She's important to us all, lad." Gran smiled tearfully. "But I fear our love will nae bring her back."

"I'll help Master Montross find her. We'll bring her back."

"Ye're but a lad." Weary resignation weakened Gran's voice.

"I'm almost a man. I will find her. With God's help, I will find her."

Gran shook her head.

Having failed to convince his grandmother, Lan left the house, seeking a seat beneath a leafless tree. Suddenly chilled, Lan feared he was somehow responsible for this catastrophe. His gran had long ago taught him to turn to God for all things, and an anguished prayer tumbled from his lips.

"Dear God, please take care o' Cara and do nae let her be afraid. Help me find her and bring her home where she belongs. I did nae mean ta neglect my duties nor break my promise ta Master Montross. Please forgive me."

Drawing a shaky breath, a lone tear slid down his cheek. Brushing at the offending drop, he knew he had to be strong. The breeze rustled the few remaining leaves hanging from the arching limbs. Lan's attempt

to suppress his grief failed miserably, and a cry spilled from his lips. "Cara! Cara!"

2

Caribbean Sea — Greater Antilles
Late June, 1718

The impending storm brewed and simmered, as did Carolene St. Hilaire's emotions.

Clouds, thick and impenetrable, just as Captain Rocher had earlier predicted, promised the heavens would soon unleash their fury.

"Mademoiselle, please go below." The words, spoken in French by Cara's companion, Adelaide Dessier, forced her to turn from the ship's rail to meet the woman's steady, gray gaze. In her late thirties, Mlle Dessier was possessed of a subtle, sweet beauty and a serenity Cara envied. *What time I am afraid I will trust in Thee*, echoed in Cara's mind, one of the very first Bible verses her father had taught her and one that often eased her fears in the fifteen years that had passed since his death.

"I am sorry, Mlle Dessier." Cara automatically replied in French. She rarely spoke English, although she'd recently conversed with some of the ship's English crew, happy to discover she still possessed a fair mastery of the language of her father. Fortunately, her grandfather hadn't witnessed those conversations, for he would have been displeased. "You asked me to do so earlier. I have been most preoccupied and your request slipped my mind."

"You mustn't become ill. You've hardly eaten anything in two days."

"I've no appetite. It's no secret to you I'm distraught over my pending marriage to that pompous Maxim Aumondier. Did I tell you how he bellowed at Pierre for not blacking his boots in *his* preferred manner? And Grandpère allowed the man to abuse Pierre, who has been his loyal valet for more than two-score years. I detest M. Aumondier."

Mlle Dessier shook her bonneted head, the wind viciously whipping the dangling ribbons and loosened silvering black strands of her hair. The woman insisted Cara and her mischievous cat, Babbette, had put the silver in her hair. Cara nearly giggled at the thought until Adelaide spoke again. "Already, M. le Compte is antagonized, more determined than ever to see you married to the man. He says you are much too like your mother, and M. Aumondier will curb your rebelliousness. I fear for you, should you anger him further."

Cara turned from the woman, gazing upon the turbulent, restless sea, no land yet in sight. "I'm not afraid, Mlle Dessier. My father always told me that the Lord will protect and comfort me."

Adelaide managed a small smile. "You know that I am praying for you, Mlle Cara. I'm not sure how our Lord will bring about your deliverance, but He will not fail you."

Fifteen years living with an uncommunicative, distant grandfather assured Cara there was only One upon whom she could rely. Surely, He would help her. Yet, if it wasn't His will, she asked her Lord to give her the strength to endure whatever she might face.

"The wind grows fiercer, and I am sure M. le