

LORI WICK

THE  
PURSUIT



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Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

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## THE PURSUIT

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## *The English Garden Collingbourne Families*

### **~Frank and Lydia Palmer**

Children: Frank, Walt, Emma, Lizzy, and Oliver

Home: Tipton

### **~William and Marianne Jennings** (William Jennings is brother to Lydia Palmer)

Children: Thomas, James, Penny, Catherine, and William

Home: Thornton Hall

### **~Robert and Anne Weston**

Children: Sarah

Home: Brown Manor

### **~Pastor Frederick and Judith Hurst**

Children: Jeffrey, Jane, Margaret, John, and Robert

Home: the manse

### **~James and Mary Walker** (Marianne Jennings' parents)

Home: Blackburn Manor

### **~Henry and Edward Steele**

Home: Newcomb Park

### **~Thomas and Elizabeth Morland** (Elizabeth is sister to Henry, Edward, and Cassandra)

Home: Ludlow

### **~Alexander and Cassandra Tate** (Cassandra is sister to Henry, Edward, and Elizabeth)

Home: Pembroke

# Prologue



## Africa

### November 1812

Edward Steele sat comfortably in the warm morning sun, writing a letter to his brother, Henry. Henry had been with him on the trip but had already headed home to England. Feeling a bit bereft without him, Edward's quill moved as he shared his heart.

*The ship leaves 5 December. I almost wish I'd gone home with you, Henry. I'm weary of travel and long for Collingbourne. I should be home in plenty of time for Christmas, and then it's home I will stay. I've enjoyed this year on the move, but I long for Newcomb Park and the family.*

*There is so much that I miss. I miss you. I miss my sisters and their husbands. I miss home and Pastor Hurst's way with the Word. I miss England and Collingbourne. In truth, I can't think of something I don't miss. I had a yearning to go with you when you left. I can't think right now why I didn't.*

*I've rambled long enough. I shall get this in the post and send myself directly after. See you soon.*

*Warmest regards,  
Edward*

Edward studied the letter he'd just written and then added at the bottom, *Please give my love to the girls.* This

done, he folded the missive and readied it for mailing. It was impossible to say what delays he might encounter once his own journey began, but he wanted Henry to know he would be on his way in two weeks' time.

"Edward?" a child's voice called just then from inside the house, causing the youngest Steele male to hide behind a large chair. He peeked out as Victoria Middleton came to the veranda, clearly looking for him.

"Edward?" she tried again. "Are you out here?"

"I might be," he said in a low voice, causing Victoria to giggle with delight and run in his direction. Her brother, Walter, was swift on her heels. Both found Edward and threw their small arms around him. He pretended to be frightened and allowed them to tumble him to the floor.

"Were you scared?" Walter asked, panting a little.

"Terribly. I thought you might be wild beasts."

Victoria, a rather serious child, took his hand.

"It's just us, Edward. We'll protect you."

"You are very brave, Victoria. Thank you."

The smile Edward gave her was invitation enough. Even though he was still sitting on the floor, she climbed into his lap.

"I'll get our book!" Walter volunteered, quickly dashed for the door, and soon returned with the volume. The day was warming swiftly as Edward made himself comfortable. His back against the side of the house, all settled in, he began to read. The session lasted for a solid 20 minutes before the children's father, Lucas Middleton, came looking for them.

"This looks fun, but it's getting warm out here."

Edward smiled a little. The children were snuggled against him as though the day were freezing.

"Why don't we take this inside, children," their father suggested, and both willingly obeyed.

“Why is it that children don’t seem to notice the heat?” Edward asked his friend as the two men brought up the rear.

“I don’t know, but whenever they share the bed with us, they’re happy to be smashed against us all night.”

“Something you could bear in England, but a little tougher here.”

“Indeed.”

With that word the men went inside. Edward had been honest in his letter to Henry: He wanted to go home. But if anything could make him hesitate, it would be how much he enjoyed the Middletons and their children. Nevertheless, he would soon be England bound.

# Chapter One



Edward Steele loved sea travel. He knew of people who became dreadfully ill when the waters were rough—Henry had experienced a bit of trouble—but Edward weathered it like a Viking. Indeed, as he boarded the ship dressed for cooler temperatures in an overcoat and top hat, traveling bag in hand, he breathed deeply, letting his lungs fill with sea air. Some of the odors on deck were not so pleasing, but that didn't hinder Edward's pleasure in his surroundings.

Traveling alone, no servant in attendance, Edward gained directions to his cabin on the *Red Dragon* and settled in, knowing the ship would be docking briefly in Lisbon, Portugal. In a cabin with two bunks but no roommate, he stowed his bag and then went out on deck to watch the activities before getting underway.

Captain Spencer, an Englishman and a man Edward had met on one other voyage, joined him at the railing where Edward watched the loading of cargo.

"Headed home, Mr Steele?"

"Yes, Captain Spencer. It's time."

The captain smiled. Having spent most of his life on the sea, he knew that feeling well.

"Were you told we'll be stopping briefly in Portugal?"

"Yes, sir. Thank you."

"If you need anything, Mr Steele, you need only ask."

"Thank you, sir. Is some of this cargo intended for Lisbon?"

"That is the plan, yes."

“What are you carrying this voyage?”

The captain explained some of the shipment, pointing to certain bales and crates as they swung on board with the aid of hooks and ropes. Edward could have listened to him for the next hour, but the captain was needed just a short time later and moved on his way.

Edward strolled about, not wanting to miss anything. The ship rocked gently under his feet, and for a moment his mind moved to his brother. Edward wondered if Henry had enjoyed his voyage home. He knew he'd arrived safely back in England, but not if he'd been ill or uncomfortable during the journey.

Edward chose another place at the railing to lean against, his head tipping back as he took in the mast high over his head. The whole concept of sailing was a fascination to him, and he enjoyed thinking about those sails at full mast, billowed with the wind.

In the midst of all of this Edward suddenly realized he was in the way. Sailors were moving past him, having to skirt his body to do their job. Not wanting to make more work, he moved back to his cabin. The moment he entered he knew something had changed.

Glancing around, he found that his own gear was just as he left it, but someone had taken the top bunk. He hadn't expected a roommate, but that wasn't what confused him. What surprised him was that he hadn't noticed a single man come on board. He'd seen a family—father, mother, and two children—and two women traveling together, but no man who appeared to be alone.

With a mental shrug, he dismissed his poor observation skills and moved toward his large satchel. He'd sent most of his things separately so he could travel light. He opened the catch and reached for his book and Bible. When he had his Bible in hand, a paper fell out.

Edward smiled as he picked it up and saw that Walter and Victoria had drawn a picture. Edward studied the



childish drawings and words, remembering their last night together in Africa.

*"Will the ship be large?" Walter wanted to know. That little boy had sailed many times in his life, and the larger ships were always his favorites.*

*"I'm not sure. What do you think?"*

*"I think I should go with you," Victoria interjected.*

*"Why is that, Victoria?"*

*"You might be lonely and sad."*

*Edward leaned to kiss her small, smooth brow.*

*"That's very sweet of you, dear, but I have a book to read, and the journey doesn't take that long. I shall be home in no time at all."*

*"Will you visit again soon?" Walter asked.*

*"Not for a time, old chap. I shall never forget the fun we've had and all the adventures we've shared, but I'm going to stay home in England for a time."*

*"Our vacation is over, and we'll be going after Christmas," Carolyn Middleton reminded her son. "So it won't be many weeks before we follow Edward home to England."*

*"Will we see you in England?" Victoria asked next.*

*"I think you shall. I'm not exactly sure when, but I'm sure we will see each other."*

*Victoria, always warmed by his smile, climbed into his lap.*

*"Is it story time?" Edward asked, knowing their father held the book.*

*"I think it is," Lucas answered, opening the book to read.*

*The children stayed close to Edward—he was always such fun—and listened to the story until their lids began to droop. Edward kept his place as Lucas and Carolyn scooped their children up to take them to bed. He wouldn't see them in the morning as he was leaving very early, but he hoped they would remember this last night as long as he would.*

The door opened suddenly, bringing Edward back to the present.

"Excuse me, sir." A gentleman's gentleman bowed as he shut the door. "I won't be a moment."

"That's fine. I'm Edward Steele, by the way."

The servant bowed again. "Denley, sir."

"Are you traveling alone, Denley?" Edward asked as the man went to his bag, opened it, and fetched a small case.

"I am not, sir. I am in the employ of Mr Osborne in the next cabin. If you'll excuse me, sir."

"Of course."

Denley, who reminded Edward a little bit of Jasper at home, exited just a moment later. Edward spoke to the empty room. "Well, Edward, not only did one man come aboard, but two. You missed them both."

Deciding not to worry about it, Edward removed and hung his coat and jacket and stretched out on his bunk, his book and Bible near at hand. He picked up his Bible first, thinking he would read until the ship was underway, completely unaware of the fact that he was the main topic of conversation in the cabin next door.



"Did I hear voices?" Mr Osborne asked his man, his voice naturally soft.

"Yes. I have a roommate, a Mr Steele."

"An Englishman?"

"Yes."

"Did he say how far he was going?"

"No. I didn't ask any questions."

Mr Osborne looked at Denley in thoughtful silence. He was a man Osborne trusted with every fiber of his being. The servant was privy to his every plan and action, nearly to his every thought.

"How old is Mr Steele?"

"I would guess mid-twenties."

"This might be helpful."

"How is that, sir?"

"We've been traveling as a duo for a very long time. A threesome would certainly throw people off our path."

Denley nodded. "A fine point, sir. I'll see what I can find out."

"Go ahead now and make sure we haven't been followed on board. Let me know when we're underway, and I'll go on deck for a time."

Denley obeyed without further comment or question. He was tempted to check on his roommate, just to gain another glimpse of him, but was afraid that would look odd. Working not to be in the way and scanning everything with the most surreptitious of movements, Denley went about his job. When the boat was finally out to sea, he returned to Osborne's cabin to tell him all was in order.



"Excuse us, sir," a female voice spoke from behind Edward, who had been watching the swiftly receding shoreline of Africa. He turned to find he was being addressed and bowed after removing his hat.

"Did you need something?" he asked good-naturedly, not missing the way both women smiled and relaxed a little under his kind gaze.

"We were wondering," the shorter of the two offered, "if you've been to Lisbon before. We have not and would like to know what to expect. Oh, I should have told you, I'm Berneen Ryan, and this is my sister, Maura."

"It's nice to meet you, ladies. I'm Edward Steele, and I must tell you that I've only been to Lisbon one time, but I do remember a little about it."

The three of them standing near the railing, Edward gave as much detail as he could recall. He'd been to one inn and one tavern, both respectable but probably not suitable for women traveling alone. Edward remembered a statue in the square—not who it was, but where—and had only just finished describing it when Captain Spencer joined them.

“How are you ladies faring?” he asked solicitously. With their pretty faces peeking out of bonnets and their fine cloaks, they had caused something of a stir among his men. He wanted to make sure they felt safe.

“We’re very well, Captain,” replied Berneen, taking the lead. “Mr Steele was telling us about Lisbon. He said that we should probably stay on board when you dock.”

“I think that’s wise counsel, ladies. We have no plans to be overly long, and you will be able to see something of Lisbon from the railing.”

“Thank you, Captain. Thank you, Mr Steele.” This said, the women smiled at both men and moved on their way.

“I was hoping Mr Steele would offer to take us ashore,” Maura admitted when they were safely out of earshot.

“So was I.”

They laughed a little and talked about going into Lisbon on their own but decided against it. Talking their father into allowing this trip had been difficult enough. If something were to happen, they would never be allowed to set foot out of Ireland again.



Overcoat and top hat in place, Osborne made his way along the deck, his eyes missing nothing. Denley had told him that things were secure, but the life Osborne had chosen to live never allowed him to get too comfortable.

He passed the Ryan sisters, giving them a small smile that did not invite interaction. Up ahead, he could see the

captain and the man he assumed was rooming with Denley. He knew there was also a family on board, but he had yet to see them.

Reaching Edward and the captain, Osborne would have nodded and kept moving, but the captain stopped him.

“Are you settled in, Mr Osborne?”

“Yes, thank you.”

The softness of his voice was nearly lost on the wind, but the captain didn’t seem to notice.

“Have you met Mr Steele?”

“I have not, sir.”

The two men were introduced and bowed in polite fashion. Osborne bowed again, and as soon as he could manage it, moved on his way.

“Royalty?” Edward questioned the captain.

“He doesn’t have an entourage, so I can’t attest to that, but I’d be willing to guess he’s an aristocrat at the very least,” Captain Spencer answered. “I’ve not sailed with him before, but he carries a certain air, does he not?”

“Indeed.”

“And so young,” the older man observed.

Edward smiled, thinking, *You don’t learn to carry yourself like that in an afternoon. This one surely carries a title of some sort.*

And for Edward that was the end of it. He found it a bit curious but knew it wasn’t his business and could find no reason to pry. He found out in a hurry, however, that not everyone had that frame of mind. When he regained his cabin, his roommate was there, and he was in a very talkative mood.

“Are we off?” Denley asked, as if he didn’t know.

“Yes. I was just speaking to Captain Spencer. He said we left ahead of time.”

Denley began to dig in his bag. He seemed to be searching for something when he asked, "Do you suffer from seasickness, sir?"

"Not usually," Edward told him. "Do you, Denley?"

"Not unless the waters are very rough. I have a vial of something if I feel it coming on. You're welcome to use it as well, Mr Steele."

"Thank you."

"I understand that we're bound for Lisbon?"

"Yes, I'd heard that as well."

"I've never been," Denley told him. He'd gone to work on more things in his case, finding a coat brush and such, but he seemed in no hurry to stop talking.

"You'll have to come again when we're going to be docked longer."

"Is it to be swift?" Denley asked.

"That's my understanding."

"Well, maybe there will be time to see a few things."

"That's possible."

Edward watched Denley place a coat on a hanger. He held it to the lamp light in several directions, brushing at it and fussing over a few areas.

"I need to take this next door," he said absently as he started toward the door. His hand was on the handle when he stopped. "Is that your coat, sir?" He indicated the coat Edward had hung on a hook. "If you'd like, I could give it a brushup when I come back."

"Thank you, Denley. I would appreciate that."

Without further ado, Denley slipped out the door and knocked on Osborne's door. Osborne answered and shut the door behind him.

"You did say you'd met him?" Denley clarified as he hung the coat.

"Yes, on deck with the captain."

Denley shook his head a little. "He didn't ask a single question. Not one."

"Did he speak at all?"

"Nothing worth mentioning. He said we'd only be in Lisbon for a very short time, not even time to go ashore."

Osborne fell silent—he was thinking again. Denley went about putting a suit of clothes together in case Osborne wanted to change, but no words were spoken. Not until it was time for supper that evening did the two discuss any sort of plan. Osborne confessed that he wanted to relax but knew he mustn't. The ship seemed safe. The ship made him feel as though he was out of reach, but he knew better. He knew anyone could be watching.



Dinner was served in shifts. The dining area was small, and although some meals might be delivered to cabins, this ship was a working vessel, and passengers were expected to remember that.

Captain Spencer, however, was not without compassion. The Waldengrave family with small children and the Ryan sisters were invited to eat a little earlier. The girls would have enjoyed the company of one of the single men on board but understood the need to keep silent about this.

As it was, Mr Waldengrave did not actually eat with his family. He helped his wife see food into their young children and assisted her with their bedtimes, but when Edward, Osborne, and Denley arrived for their meal, he was also in attendance.

"Waldengrave," he said as he stood and gave his name, bowing to each man, even Denley.

"Edward Steele," that man volunteered, and Osborne and Denley did the same. Denley became instantly invisible at one corner of the table, his manner doing nothing to

attract attention as he waited. He didn't have long. Bowls of food began to appear and the men, more than ready for food, began to eat.

"To where are you traveling?" Waldengrave asked Edward.

"England. And yourself, Mr Waldengrave?" he asked out of courtesy. He wasn't certain he was comfortable with this man. He knew he was traveling with his family and couldn't understand why he would leave his wife and children alone on this ship.

"I'm headed to London. How about you, Osborne?"

"London also," he said calmly, using his fork with quiet efficiency and reflecting an unconscious air of royalty.

"Have you lived there long?" Waldengrave wished to know, actually wondering what palace he might be headed to.

"All my life. How about yourself?"

This was all the invitation Waldengrave needed. He began to speak about his life and family. Edward and Osborne were very good listeners, nodding in all the right places and seemingly filled with interest.

"What took you to Africa?" Waldengrave asked Osborne when he finally stopped for air.

"Travel as well. I'd never been."

"How about you, Steele?"

"Just travel. I have a few friends there."

Waldengrave was off again after this, telling the men why he'd been in Africa. Edward did his best to attend, but the man changed subjects very swiftly.

"I thought you said you'd been in Africa for four months," Osborne suddenly interjected, not having raised his voice in the least.

"We have."

"But you just now said you were in Italy in September."

Waldengrave looked confused.



"What month is this?"

"December."

With little more than a shrug and a grunt, Waldengrave went back to his supper. Osborne's and Edward's gaze met for just a moment before they returned to their own plates. Denley, of course, said nothing, but he hadn't missed a thing.



Edward was alone in the cabin as he woke the third morning of the voyage. He washed and shaved, an interesting feat with the wind having picked up a bit. He'd only just finished dressing when Denley returned.

Edward watched as that man sat on the room's one chair, his eyes on nothing. The lighting wasn't the best, but Edward could tell he was unwell.

"Do you want your bag, Denley?" Edward asked kindly. It never once occurred to him not to help. "Shall I find that vial for you?"

"I don't believe I'm seasick, Mr Steele, but thank you."

"Should I tell the captain that you're unwell, or Osborne?"

"No, but thank you. I believe I'll just sit for a time."

Edward took him at his word but still went next door and knocked.

"Denley?" Osborne asked from within.

"No, it's Edward Steele."

The door opened.

"I wanted to make sure you knew that Denley wasn't feeling his best."

"Thank you."

"Let me know if there's something I can do."

"Yes, I'll do that."

Edward walked away thinking that if he hadn't watched Osborne in action the night before at the supper table, he'd think him a complete snob. Osborne could do things with his voice that only his friend, Bathurst, could pull off. And he was the son of a baron.

Putting both Osborne and Denley from his mind, Edward went in search of breakfast. He wasn't at his best with an empty stomach and thought his feelings might be more charitable if he had a little food.



"How are you?" Osborne had gone next door to check on his man. Denley had climbed into his bunk, and Osborne's height gave him a perfect view of the man's face. There was no mistaking the misery in Denley's eyes.

"I have the most dreadful headache, sir. I can't think what's brought it on."

"I'll order some breakfast for you and have it sent."

"Thank you."

Osborne placed his hand against the man's brow. It was hot to the touch. He didn't linger but went directly for the captain. The boat might only be docking briefly at Lisbon the next day, but Osborne thought he and Denley might be forced to disembark.



"Good morning, ladies," Edward greeted the Ryan sisters as he took a seat at the small dining table. "I trust you slept well."

"It was rough last night," Maura answered, her eyes a bit large.

“Yes, I believe the wind has picked up. Eating might help.”

Both women had cups of tea in front of them but nothing on their plates. Edward had no desire to make anyone feel worse, but he had to have food. He began to serve himself eggs and bacon, aware that the ladies had turned slightly away from him.

He was in the midst of his meal when the captain arrived. He greeted the three at the table but went directly to the ship’s cook. He wasn’t with the cook very long before coming and sitting close to Edward. He spoke, keeping his voice low.

“Denley, your cabin mate, is quite unwell, Mr Steele. Would you like me to move him down with the men?”

“No,” Edward told him without hesitation, thinking that would be most uncomfortable for the man. “I don’t mind, Captain, and I can tell Mr Osborne if Denley needs something.”

“Very well. If you have any concerns, please come to me.”

The moment Edward finished eating, he returned to his cabin. Osborne was on hand, helping Denley eat. Edward did not linger.

“Let me know if I can assist with anything.”

“Thank you,” Osborne said, turning to see him at the door. “Is it going to bother you if he stays in here?”

“No. We’ll get along just fine.”

“Thank you,” Osborne said again, his voice even lower.

Edward didn’t know what he would do for the next few hours. He took himself on deck and stared at the miles of ocean around him, never tiring of the sight. Finding his mind strongly on Denley and Osborne, he prayed for both men.