

A Season for Hope

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Rosie Goodwin is the million-copy bestselling author of more than thirty-five novels. She is the first author in the world to be allowed to follow three of Catherine Cookson's trilogies with her own sequels. Having worked in the social services sector for many years, then fostered a number of children, she is now a full-time novelist. She is one of the top 50 most borrowed authors from UK libraries. Rosie lives in Nuneaton, the setting for many of her books, with her husband and their beloved dogs.

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A Season
for Hope

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This book is for all the lovely readers who have supported me since publication. You are all very special, thank you xxx

Chapter One

Whitby, March 1845

The laundry room was suddenly plunged into gloom as a figure blocked the doorway. The young woman pounding the washing in the deep tub with a wooden dolly stick stilled and glanced hopefully towards it. Her stomach swooped with nerves and happiness at the sight of the master standing there, looking resplendent in his riding gear, his fair hair tousled from the ride.

He quickly glanced over his shoulder to make sure they couldn't be overheard before telling her softly, 'The large barn, ten o'clock tonight.' Then he turned on his smart leather heel and was gone, leaving the girl leaning heavily against the wooden tub, her heart pounding. She normally never minded being summoned – in fact she looked forward to it – but tonight would be different.

Barnaby Greenwood was her master and as well as employing her as a laundry maid at his enormous house, he also employed her father and brothers. He was one of the richest and most powerful men in Whitby. He owned a large fleet of fishing trawlers and a shipyard, as well as most of the dwellings that the fishermen lived in. Her father and two of her brothers worked on one of the trawlers, while her other two brothers were employed at his shipyard. And tonight

she had something to tell him and she had no idea how he would react to it. With a shuddering sigh, she bent to the task at hand and got on with her work.

The day passed interminably slowly but at last, at seven o'clock, she put the next day's washing in to soak, and after drying her rough hands on her pinafore, wearily made her way to the kitchen for her supper.

The noise of the staff chattering and the warmth from the range met her when she entered the room. Seeing her, the cook nodded towards the table saying, 'About time too. I were about to send a search party out for you. Sit yourself down and get something on your plate afore it's all gone.'

Jimmy, the young groom, immediately shuffled along to make room next to him on the long oak bench that stretched down one side of the table, and not wanting to hurt his feelings, the girl sat down beside him, causing a few giggles from the female staff and some chuckles from the males. Jimmy made no secret of the fact that he was sweet on Amber, although she had never given him any encouragement.

'Here you go, Amber.' Without being asked, Jimmy began to load a generous portion of meat and potato pie onto her plate along with a selection of vegetables and she managed a wavering smile. Usually she was ravenously hungry by the time she finished work but tonight the food seemed to stick in her throat and she had to keep taking sips of water to wash it down.

The higher-up servants – the mistress's lady's maid, the butler, the parlourmaids and the housekeeper – had eaten their meal some time ago after the family had been served

theirs. Now the lowly staff were the last to eat and whereas Amber usually enjoyed their banter, tonight she just longed for the privacy of the little room she shared with her good friend Nancy, the scullery maid, up in the attic in the servants' quarters.

There was a large bread and butter pudding and a jug of creamy yellow custard to follow the main meal but Amber excused herself when it was served and without giving anyone time to ask any questions, she scuttled away up the steep wooden staircase, leaving Jimmy with a disappointed frown on his face.

'I wonder what's wrong with her?' the cook said thoughtfully when Amber had gone. 'It ain't like her to let good food go to waste.' She looked pointedly at Nancy but the girl merely shrugged and turned her attention to the food in front of her.

It was part of Nancy's job to help the kitchen maid tackle the enormous pile of dirty dishes after each meal, and it was going on for nine o'clock that evening before they were all washed and dried and put away in their rightful places. Only then did Nancy manage to get away to join Amber upstairs.

When Nancy entered their room, Amber was brushing her hair. Although she couldn't be termed as classically beautiful – she was rather tall for a girl and although she was seventeen, her figure was boyish – but her deep tawny-coloured eyes and her glorious mass of rich strawberry-blonde curls more than made up for that. It hung down her back like a glorious silk cloak and reminded Nancy of the setting sun. Nancy's hair was, as her mother termed it,

as straight as pump water and a mousy colour, and she was slim to the point of being skinny. Her eyes were a dull grey and although she had always envied Amber her looks, it didn't stop her caring for her.

'So you've had the royal summons again, 'ave yer?' Nancy said disapprovingly as she quickly closed the bedroom door behind her. Outside, the gardens were slowly coming back to life after a long cold winter but it was still cold up in the attics.

Amber nodded miserably.

'And are you goin' to tell 'im tonight?'

'I don't have much choice, do I?' Amber sighed. 'This ain't somethin' that I'll be able to hide for much longer.' As she spoke, she absent-mindedly stroked her still flat stomach as Nancy chewed on her lip.

'An' what do yer think he'll say?'

Amber shrugged. 'I won't know till I tell him, will I?'

Hearing the wobble in her friend's voice, angry colour flowed into Nancy's thin cheeks and she hurried across to squeeze Amber's slim shoulders.

'He's a bloody disgrace, that one is,' she said. 'Didn't I tell you from day one that nothin' good'd come o' these meetins? Why, for two pins I'd go an' tell t'mistress what he's been up to.'

Amber shook her head hurriedly. 'No, you mustn't do that, Nancy,' she told her sharply. 'For a start, the mistress would never believe you, an' don't forget, me whole family rely on the work he gives 'em. We'd all end up in t'poor house if he were to turn 'em out o' the cottage. Not that he ever would – he loves me!' she said quickly.

‘Huh! So you say, but we’ll see now, won’t we? An’ what are you goin’ to do if he don’t stand by you? What’ll your da say when you turn up back at home wi’ your belly full?’

Amber blinked back tears. She had wondered the same thing herself. In fact, she’d thought of nothing else for days. But then she was sure it wouldn’t come to that. Barnaby would stand by her, he had to. He’d told her often enough that he loved her, hadn’t he? And this might be just the push he needed to make him leave his wife, as he’d promised he would when the time was right. But what if he doesn’t? a niggly little voice in the back of her mind asked. Her da was a kind, gentle man and he loved his family but were he ever to discover who had fathered this baby she dreaded to think what he might do to the master if he didn’t stand by her.

‘I shan’t tell him who it were,’ she told Nancy and the girl looked horrified.

‘But you’ll *have* to!’

‘I’ve told you, everything is gonna be all right.’

Amber glanced at the little tin clock on the small table by the window. ‘Anyway, I’d best be off now an’ ger it over wi.’ And with that she left the room as Nancy stared worriedly after her.

Once downstairs, Amber took the door that led into the yard rather than the one to the kitchen, pausing to look around to ensure no one was about. It was as quiet as the grave, so lifting her drab grey skirt she took a deep breath and picked her way across the cobbles to the barn. It had been early in November when her affair with the master had begun. It had started with smiles and the odd word and then, late one evening when Amber had gone out into the yard to

get some air, she had met him coming out of the stables. They had just talked on that first evening and she found that she felt at ease with him. He was an incredibly handsome man and Amber had been flattered when he showed an interest in her and confided that he wasn't happy in his marriage. The staff were aware that he and his wife Louisa had separate rooms, and Amber had felt sorry for him. From then on, they had started to meet and eventually she had given herself to him up in the hayloft as he whispered words of endearment in her ear.

'One day when the time is right, I shall tell Louisa that I love you,' he had promised. 'And then we'll be together for always.'

And she had believed every word he said. She could still remember the first time she had given herself to him as if it was yesterday. She had no regrets because she loved him with all her heart but now she wondered how he would take the news that he was about to become a father. Hopefully, this would be the spur he needed for them to be together. And so, taking a deep breath, she lifted her chin and moved on; there could be no more delaying.

After entering the barn, she stood for some minutes allowing her eyes to adjust to the gloom, then jumped back in alarm as a large tabby cat in pursuit of a rat almost as big as itself narrowly avoided racing across her foot. Her heart had been beating wildly before but now it was racing so much that she was worried it would leap out of her chest. And it was then that she heard the creak of the enormous barn door behind her and spinning about she saw the master striding towards her.

‘Hello, Amber,’ he said with a worried frown, holding his arms out towards her. ‘Come here, there’s something I need to speak to you about.’ Barnaby wasn’t looking forward to this conversation because he knew it was going to hurt her.

‘An’ I need to tell you sommat an’ all,’ Amber said nervously as she licked her dry lips. ‘The thing is . . . I think I’m in the family way . . .’

He looked shocked. ‘And you’re telling me that the child is mine? Is that it?’

Hurt showed in her eyes before she nodded and said quietly, ‘Of course it is. I ain’t never laid wi’ no one else, you know that.’

She was disappointed at his reaction but then she supposed she should have known that it would come as a terrible shock.

He moaned deep in his throat and began to pace up and down, kicking up the loose straw that lay about the floor, causing a storm of dust to rise into the air.

Hurrying to him she took his large hands in her rough, calloused ones. ‘Look, this won’t be so bad,’ she told him urgently. ‘You allus said we’d be together one day. Happen this can just make things come about sooner than we’d thought.’

Something about his stiff stance disturbed her and she felt the first stirrings of panic. Surely he wouldn’t turn his back on her when they meant so much to each other, especially now he knew that she was carrying his child?

Barnaby, meanwhile, was shaking his head as he struggled to come to terms with what she had told him. He turned away, running his hand distractedly through his thick thatch

of hair, and when he turned back to her the look on his face made her heart skip a beat.

‘I-I know what I promised,’ he said. ‘But the thing is . . . something has happened and I can’t leave Louisa.’

Amber recoiled as if she had been slapped in the face. ‘What do you mean? Of course you can, we’re going to have a baby . . .’

He shook his head regretfully and she watched him fumble in the pocket of his smart trousers before handing her a shining gold sovereign. It seemed to burn into her skin as she stared down at it.

‘I’m so sorry, Amber,’ he told her in a choked voice. ‘But I think it might be better if you got rid of it. There’s a woman on the outskirts of the town, I believe, who helps women in your position.’

In that moment all her hopes and dreams turned to ashes and tears sprang to her eyes. She knew immediately who he was speaking of: Lil Bentley was an old lady who the townsfolk said was a witch. She had helped many young women out of the plight Amber found herself in but some of them had ended up in an early grave because of it, and Amber knew that she would never do as he asked, although she wasn’t quite brave enough to tell him so.

‘So you never meant *any* of what you said?’ she whispered dully as she felt her heart break. ‘You just used me!’

‘No, no, I *do* care about you, *really* I do but . . .’ He spread his hands. How could he make her understand what he had to lose?

She backed away from him as if she was suddenly seeing him for the first time.

‘Perhaps when you’ve got rid of the baby you could come back,’ he suggested. The thought of never seeing her again was painful. But she shook her head. How could she ever trust him or believe a word he said ever again?

‘I’ll tell Mrs Boswell that I have given you a few days off because your mother is ill or something,’ he said desperately.

‘Yes, *sir*.’ Amber bobbed her knee and walked away leaving Barnaby Greenwood to stare after her, his shoulders sagging as shame swept through him. He knew what he was doing to Amber was wrong but he was so confused and miserable that he had convinced himself it was right – or at least he had tried to.

It was ironic, he thought, that all he and his wife Louisa had ever wanted was a child of their own and now that he had the chance to be a father he had ordered the girl to get rid of it!

Amber knew that Mrs Boswell, the housekeeper, wouldn’t be at all pleased when she told her that the master had given her permission to be away from her post, but that was the least of Amber’s troubles for now. First, she would have to face her mother and she quaked at the thought.

‘So how did he take the news?’ Nancy was sitting up in her bed when Amber crept back into their room. In response, Amber opened her palm to reveal the gold sovereign lying there.

‘Lordy . . . has he give you the sack?’ Nancy asked.

Amber shook her head. ‘No . . . he gave me this an’ told me to get rid o’ the bairn,’ she answered in a wobbly voice.

Nancy gasped as her hand flew to her mouth. ‘But you ain’t goin’ to go along that road, surely?’ she said fearfully. ‘There’s so many things can go wrong.’

‘I know.’ Amber sank onto the end of her bed dejectedly. ‘He says I can come back once I’ve got rid of it but I don’t think I can; I ain’t brave enough.’

‘The lousy bastard! Didn’t I allus tell you this would end in tears?’ Nancy ranted. ‘What’ll you do now?’

Amber shrugged. ‘I ain’t give it much thought yet but I’ll leave first thing in t’ mornin’ an’ go and see me mam, though Lord knows what she’ll say when I tell ’er. I won’t dare let on to me dad who the bairn’s father is, cos if he finds out he’ll be so angry I don’t know what he’d be capable of.’

Nancy gave a deep sigh as she reached out to stroke Amber’s arm sympathetically. ‘Well, all I can say is, rather you than me, lass!’