

# ANGELICA'S RESCUER

THE STRASBURG CHRONICLES, BOOK ONE



PIPPA GREATHOUSE

BLUSHING BOOKS

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## CHAPTER 1



PHILADELPHIA, 1850

"*Y*ou do realize, Angelica," Thomas Dreifus said, as he tapped his pencil on the desk, trying to be understanding. "That with little inheritance left, and little prospects, you are in a difficult situation."

"Yes, Uncle Thomas, I do. Do I not have enough funds to manage for at least a few months?" Angelica Dawson raised her green eyes to his defiantly.

Thomas looked down at his niece and sighed. He wished he could tell her what she wanted to hear. She so looked like his sister, Lizzy, had, at her age, with her dark green eyes and long red, curly hair. The innocence of the few freckles that marched across the bridge of her nose made her resemble Lizzy even more.

"You could always come and live with us, Angelica. I could accept the servants into the house as well, for a few months, at least until they could find other employment. But you must come with them; you cannot stay in the house without a chaperone; you realize that."

Angelica sighed as well. "So they say. I am sorry, Uncle. I had no idea the estate was this low on funds. But I cannot move in with you and Aunt Sarah. I fear she would be frantic, having me there. I am certain it would not work." Her gaze moved past him, toward the window, and she troubled her full lower lip with her teeth. "I miss my mother so much, it hurts."

*Now why had she allowed that to come out?* She bolted from her chair and turned away, pacing; she was determined not to let her uncle see the threatening tears.

What she did not see was that her uncle was having trouble fighting his own.

"But not your father?" he finally said.

Angelica's chin came up; her eyes looked directly into his. "You mean my step father? The one who squandered my mother's inheritance; the one who mistreated both of us; who—" Now, she looked away. "No, Uncle. I do not miss him. My mother might have been able to have better care, had he not used up the family fortune totally before he died."

"I hear your frustration, Angel," he said softly, using her childhood name this time. "But I do not know how her care could have been any better. I spoke with Dr. Biggs myself, regularly. If there had been any chance at all of her improvement, he would eagerly have sent her to a specialist. And I would have gladly paid for it myself."

Angelica ran to him and flung her hands around his neck. "I know you would have, Uncle," she whispered. His arm went around her shoulders, and she straightened.

Turning away and walking toward the window that overlooked the street, she looked down at the multitude of horses and buggies. She watched as a very tall man made his way across it, picking his way among the traffic. Well dressed and handsome, with dark hair and a nice smile, he presented a stunning figure. She wondered idly what it must be like to be so tall.

Suddenly, as if he knew she was watching, his eyes rose toward

the window. They were almost a silver grey, glinting in the sun, and an expression of amusement showed on his face, even reaching his eyes.

Embarrassed that he had seen her watching him, Angelica turned away and quickly brushed the remaining tears from her face.

"All right, Uncle Thomas," she sighed. "What is it that you wished to tell me?" She had not realized he was standing behind her until he tugged on a red curl, affectionately, much as he had when she was a little girl.

"Sit down, Angelica," he said softly. "Please."

Angelica walked back around to the chair that sat in front of his desk and faced him bravely, sitting.

"I'm listening, sir."

Thomas, now at his desk, leaned forward, studying his niece a moment before proceeding.

"I have an old friend, Angelica, who has recently passed on. He had the title of Viscount, in England. He renounced it when he came to America. His only son has inherited his estate. The young man is responsible, seems to be managing the estate very well. It is quite a large one."

"And?" Her only word was cold. Dread fell like a stone, crushing Angelica; there was suddenly no doubt where this was going. Her green eyes lost color, and her gaze lowered to the Turkish rug on which her small feet were resting.

"The answer to your unspoken question, Angel, is, yes. He needs to marry."

*Of course, he does,* Angelica thought bitterly.

"He needs a wife at his side to help run it. He is in his early thirties and has always refused to settle down and take a bride. But he feels he no longer has that luxury. And he, for some reason, prefers not to choose locally." He read her expression of sadness and leaned back in his desk chair. "Angelica, I know this young man; he is responsible; mature; he seems kind; I would not recommend him

unless I thought he would be good to you." He watched his niece closely. She had not moved. "It is a large estate, Angelica, and he is a wealthy man; he does not need a large dowry from his bride. You have no idea how lucky you are that he would even consider you."

She sat in front of him in silence for what seemed an eternity.

"Angelica? Have you no questions?"

She raised sad eyes to his, before rising and shaking her head in despair. Taking her bag in her hand, she moved toward the door.

"Angelica?"

She paused, her hand on the doorknob, waiting.

"I shall bring him by tomorrow afternoon at two, to meet you. We shall not stay long; but I do wish to see how the two of you seem to get on. It would please me greatly if you were gracious to him."

Angelica made no response, suddenly feeling the need to escape. Her hand twisted the door handle, pulling it open. It was as if being on the other side of the door was crucial. She left, hurrying down the hall toward the stairs.

She did not see the tall gentleman who passed her in the hall, wondering at the tears she attempted to hide, and hoping they were not due to him.