



*Linore Rose Burkard*

*Inspirational Romance  
for the Jane Austen Soul*



**Excerpt from**  
*Before the Season Ends*

**CHAPTER ONE**



Chesterton, Hertfordshire: England – 1813

Something would have to be done about Ariana.

All winter Miss Ariana Forsythe, aged nineteen, had been going about the house sighing.

“Mr. Hathaway is my lot in life!”

She spoke as though the prospect of that life was a great burden to bear, but one which she had properly reconciled herself to. When her declarations met with exasperation or reproach from her family—for no one else was convinced Mr. Hathaway, the rector, was her lot—she usually responded in a perplexed manner. Hadn't they understood for an age that her calling was to wed a man of the cloth? Was there another man of God, other than their rector, available to her? No. It only stood to reason, therefore, that Mr. Hathaway was her lot in life. Their cold reception to the thought of the marriage was unfathomable.

When she was seventeen, (a perfectly respectable marrying age) she had romantic hopes about a young and brilliant assistant to the rector, one Mr. Stresham. It was shortly after meeting him, in fact, that she had formed the opinion the Almighty was calling her to marry a man of God. Mr. Stresham even had the approval of her parents. But the man took a situation in another parish without

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asking Ariana to accompany him as his wife. She was disappointed, but not one to give up easily, continued to speak of “the calling,” waiting in hope for another Mr. Stresham of sorts. But no man came. And now she had reached the conclusion that Mr. Hathaway--Mr. Hathaway, the rector, (approaching the age of sixty!) would have to do.

Her parents, Charles and Julia Forsythe, were sitting in their comfortably furnished morning room, Julia with a cup of tea before her, and Charles with his newspaper. A steady warmth was emanating from the hearth.

“What shall we do about Ariana?” Mrs. Forsythe, being an observant mama, had been growing in her conviction that the situation called for some action.

“What do you suggest, my dear?” Her husband reluctantly folded his paper; he knew his wife wanted a discussion of the matter and that he would get precious little reading done until she had got it.

She held up a folded piece of foolscap: the annual letter from Agatha Bentley, Charles’s sister, asking for Alberta, the eldest Forsythe daughter, for the season in London. It had arrived the day before.

Aunt Bentley was a childless wealthy widow and a hopeless socialite. For the past three years she had written annually to tell her brother and his wife why they ought to let her sponsor their eldest daughter for a London season. She owned a house in Mayfair (could anything be more respectable than that?) and knew a great deal of the big-wigs in society. She had, in fact, that most important of commodities which the Forsythes completely lacked: connexions. And as Charles’s family were her only living relatives, she was prepared--even anxious--to serve as chaperon for her niece.

Much to the lady's frustration, Julia and Charles had annually extinguished her hopes, replying to her letters graciously but with the inevitable, “We cannot countenance a separation from our child at this time,” and so on. Charles was unflinching on this point, never doubting his girls would reap a greater benefit by remaining beneath his own roof. They knew full well, moreover, that Aunt Agatha could not hope, with all her money and connexions to find as suitable a husband for their offspring as

was possible right in Chesterton.

Why not? For the profound reason that Aunt Bentley had no religion whatsoever.

And yet, due to the distressing state of affairs with Ariana, Julia wished to consider her latest offer. With the letter waving in her hand she said, "I think we ought to oblige your sister this year. She must be lonely, poor thing, and besides removing Ariana from the parish, a visit to the city could prove beneficial for her education."

Ariana's father silently considered the matter. His eldest daughter Alberta was as good as wed, having recently accepted an offer of marriage--to no one's surprise--from John Norledge. Ariana, his second eldest, had been irksome in regard to the rector, but to pack her off to London? Surely the situation was not so dire as to warrant such a move.

"I think there is nothing else for it," Mrs. Forsythe said emphatically. "Ariana is determined about Mr. Hathaway and, even though we can forbid her to speak to the man, she will pine and sigh and like as not drive me to distraction!"

Taking a pipe out of his waistcoat pocket (though he never smoked), Mr. Forsythe absently rubbed the polished wood in his fingers.

"I recall other fanciful notions of our daughter's," he said finally, "and they slipped away in time. Recall, if you will, when she was above certain her destiny was to be a missionary--to America. That desire faded. She fancies this, she fancies that; soon she will fancy another thing entirely, and we shan't hear another word about the 'wonderful rector' again."

Mrs. Forsythe's countenance, still attractive in her forties, became fretful.

"I grant that she has had strong...affections before. But this time, my dear, it is a complicated affection for in this case it is the heart of the ah, *affected*, which we must consider. It has ideas of its own."

"Of its own?"

Mrs. Forsythe looked about the room to be certain no one else had entered. The servants were so practiced at coming and going quietly, their presence might not be marked. But no, there was only

the two of them. She lowered her voice anyway.

“The rector! I do not think he intends to lose her! What could delight him more than a young, healthy wife who might fill his table with offspring?”

Mr. Forsythe shook his head. “Our rector is not the man to think only of himself; he must agree with us on the obvious unsuitability of the match.”

The rector was Thaddeus Admonicus Hathaway, of the Church in the Village Square. Mr. Hathaway was a good man. His sermons were grounded in sound religion, which meant they were based on orthodox Christian teaching. He was clever, and a popular dinner guest of the gentry, including the Forsythes. If these had not been true of him, Mr. Forsythe might have been as concerned as his wife. Knowing Mr. Hathaway, however, Charles Forsythe did not think a drastic action such as sending his daughter to the bustling metropolis of London, was necessary.

Mrs. Forsythe chose not to argue with her spouse. She would simply commit the matter to prayer. If the Almighty decided that Ariana must be removed to Agatha’s house, then He would make it clear to her husband. In her years of marriage she had discovered that God was the Great Communicator, and she had no right to try and usurp that power. Her part was to pray, sincerely and earnestly.

Mr. Forsythe gave his judgment: “I fear that rather than exerting a godly influence upon her aunt, Ariana would be drawn astray by the ungodliness of London society.”

“Do you doubt her so much, Charles? This infatuation with Mr. Hathaway merely results from her youth, her admiration for his superior learning, and especially,” she said, leaning forward and giving him a meaningful look, “for lack of a young man who has your approval! Have you not frowned upon every male who has approached her in the past? Why, Mr. Hathaway is the first whom you have failed to frighten off and only because he is our rector! 'Tis little wonder a young girl takes a fanciful notion into her head!”

When he made no answer, she added, while adjusting the frilly morning cap on her head, “Mr. Hathaway causes me concern!”

Mr. Forsythe's countenance was sober. "'Tis my sister who warrants the concern. She will wish to make a match for our daughter--and she will not be content with just any *mister* I assure you. In addition to which, a girl as pretty as our daughter will undoubtedly attract attention of the wrong sort."

Julia was flustered for a second, but countered, "Agatha is no threat to our child. We shall say we are sending Ariana to see the sights, take in the museums and so forth. Surely there is no harm in that. A dinner party here or there should not be of concern. And Ariana is too intelligent to allow herself to be foisted upon an unsuitable man for a fortune or title."

*Too intelligent?* He thought of the aging minister that no one had had to "foist" her upon. Aloud he merely said, "I shall speak with her tonight. She shall be brought to reason, depend upon it. There will be no need to pack her off to London."

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**Linore Rose Burkard** writes *Inspirational Romance for the Jane Austen Soul*. Her characters take you back in time to experience life and love during Regency England (circa 1800 – 1830). Ms. Burkard's novels include *Before the Season Ends* and *The House on Grosvenor Square* (coming April, 2009). Her stories blend Christian faith and romance with well-researched details from the Regency period. For more information, visit: [www.LinoreRoseBurkard.com](http://www.LinoreRoseBurkard.com)

